

What Doesn't Kill You... Will Probably Try Again

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What Doesn't Kill You... Will Probably Try Again

by [amoralagent](#)

Summary

"I take it introductions aren't your forte."

"I take it you get threatened with knives often." Will countered, and Hannibal's mouth did the strange little quirk again that implied a smile, but didn't answer.

Serial Killer AU! Will gets into someone's car with a plan to kill them. That plan gets utterly ruined.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Life had been kicking Will's ass. Royally. The last straw was the break down of his car, just a half hour drive from Wolf Trap. He had to quickly pull off to the side of the road and reluctantly pulled out the toolbox when the engine grumbled and stuttered quiet for the third and last time. Halfway into replacing a faulty spark plug that he *knew* was on its way out, his hand slipped on the torque and he yelled. Right on the knuckle. Safe to say it would leave a bruise. The only silver lining was the relatively mild weather.

Once he'd thrown all his toys from the cot, so-to-speak, and resisted the urge to break the car himself, he got on with it. It was an hour's work that made his hands sting, and smell of motor oil. The morning sun crept up the sky, sharp and bright like a sight on a scope. It made him sweat too much. *Lovely*.

Eventually, Will put the tools away and got back in the car. Sighing, he turned the ignition. The sound of a car engine rumbling to life had never been so satisfying.

He hadn't been home since late the last afternoon- the dogs would be worrying by now. But, as any good dog-parent would, he left out pee pads they knew how to use, made sure the house was warm enough, gave them fresh water, fed them more than usual. Even allowed the most anxious or attached ones to have some of his shirts so they wouldn't be far from his scent.

Still, the dogs would be missing him, undoubtedly. He sure missed them. But, well, they'd probably forgive him.

The dead body in the trunk made for a charming excuse.

As for the identity of said body, Will had known the man for a while, and had observed him frequently at one of the fancier bars a good handful of miles out. There had always been scabs on knuckles, or fresh cuts- noticeable dog hair on his clothes. He'd stood out, to Will. And he could've related to him if his border collie wasn't limping every time he pulled it into the place. Seeing the poor thing visibly shaking with fear was enough to have Will's mind made up.

It had been clean, but not thrilling. *Too quick*. Will's hands tightened around the steering wheel as he thought about it, how dull the blood looked. It was-- *disappointing*. Taking the dog with him would've been too much of a risk, but maybe he'd go back to local shelter in the next week or so and see whether or not he had been claimed. As murders go, it wasn't the best. Not even among his top ten. Shame, really. Maybe he was losing his spark, or-- *what do creatives call it? His inspiration?*

Perhaps spicing this up would help? It works with sex. Something needed him to get back into the swing of things, especially after a such low period. He just couldn't figure out what. It could be a change his routine of picking and choosing criminals he'd heard of; that, or disagreeable wrongdoers he'd meet on happenstance. He'd worked himself into the safe habit

of mimicking patterns of street gangs, or, rarely, accidental death, or even the odd brazen serial killer, if they were in the area.

What can he say, Will knew how to do it right- well enough so the FBI wouldn't know or notice, and couldn't, without a mind that ticks like his does. The Devil's in the details. He'd read about them, see crime scene tape and chalk outlines and blaring sirens on the muted television scenes at local bars. Sometimes, if he felt so inclined, he would buy a newspaper off a street vendor and find the compact stories in the middle pages that people are too lazy to read, marking something down for later that caught his eye. He'd examine exclusive crime scene photos, and close his eyes, inhale a breath. And it would take him.

But when you can embody and assimilate so wholly: *where does that leave you?*

There had been a couple of occasions where he'd slowly slip into the mind of someone he'd seen glimpses of, through their work. The dogs would become distant in response, oddly submissive. Even Winston would bow under his gaze, averting his eyes. Will would leave home, come back, and they'd growl at him when he came in the door.

They didn't recognise him.

One time, Buster had snapped at his hand and made him bleed. The shock of it alone made Will wake up to himself, like the final swing and clack of a Newton's cradle, and he'd managed to stop.

But he'd still get the nightmares of fusing into their identity, if he'd seen their face. Watch from outside his body as he was being gutted and trying helplessly to push his own intestines back inside himself. Things like that, none of them tasteful. The best nights sleep he could hope for was a restless but dreamless one.

Hey, on the bright side, his dogs could use a little more protein in their diets. If they're lucky, a kidney wouldn't go amiss.

Creative rut aside (if you could really call it that) the issues that had been far more mental than physical problems, it just so happened that the car turning out to be the coup de grâce, serving a perfect metaphor.

All his intense, intrusive thoughts, and the abhorrent nightmares had been getting more and more unbearable, and stitched themselves into this metastasis of existentialistic loneliness; a Frankenstein-like, depressive headspace he felt he had to kill his way out of. It came and went in bouts. Without any friends, or really anyone, to be a sounding board and help him out of it, it was fucking torture.

The dogs had caught on, he knew- some more aloof, some far too clingy. Winston would bring Will his toys to see if it would make him feel better. When he got home, he found a chewed, beaten up Christmas penguin toy buried under his duvet.

That got to him more than any murder could. Even though it was slightly damp and stunk of dog breath, it still made Will's heart hurt a little in gratitude and dumbfounding adoration.

Predictably, the pack were howling and yipping as soon as they heard a car in the distance, and came bursting out to say hello when a key was snuck in the door. Wiggling and sniffing and whining happily. Will was exhausted, but tried his best to mirror their excitement, crouching down to pet and compliment them liberally. A couple of the biggest ones stretched up to lick at his face, and he obliged them, kissing the tops of their heads in return, if they stayed still long enough. Dog hair hung in the air like nuclear fallout once they'd been instructed to go pee.

It felt good to be home again. Safe and loved, even if they couldn't have conversations. Will watched them all bounding around in the dewy grass and despite himself, he smiled.

Half awake, he rustled himself up something to eat, fed the dogs, and collapsed into bed for a solid three hour nap. Soldiering along in spite of the minor battle wound to his knuckles, he busied himself with mechanical work for the rest of the day. He'd been remodelling a small decommissioned outboard boat engine he'd found in a scrap metal yard. *Waste not, want not*, he figured. It could easily sell for a few thousand, making quite a neat profit from any parts he needed already provided by his father's gifted toolbox from when he was fourteen. Will didn't think about his father very much, actually.

The guy at the bar had reminded Will of him, in a few ways. Maybe that's what had truly gotten under his skin. If so, he hoped it would at least make him feel something. Upset, resentment, anger- anything would be useful to get the ball rolling again. Something to expand and multiply within him until it reached critical mass, surging through him with his blood, and it would make him feel alive. Ironically, surrounded by death and being the one to cause it, Will just wanted to feel fucking alive. He was *desperate*.

Whilst eating lunch, consisting of an overly-sweet apple and a pisspoor ham sandwich, an idea began forming. He couldn't really grasp it, it was some vague want to add spontaneity to things, to not seek out his-- *victims*. Frustratingly, it circled and flitted inside his mind like a bird caught in a kitchen, hitting into things and uncertain of everything. So he sighed, rubbing his face.

In terms of serial killing, yes, spontaneous action, if calculated right, was the best thing to achieve if you didn't want to be caught. No logic, no plan, meant no discernible and traceable pattern. No underlying motive, or association. It was either that, or leaving no evidential trace, which wasn't too much hassle if the situation was right. In college that he was later kicked out of, he'd slunk into one or two of the forensic teaching lectures, and done enough research to know what not to leave behind. Alternatively, what to, if you need to implicate someone, coax a simple narrative.

But, unfortunately, Will still bore the weight of a morally-grey sense of propriety. Apart from the whole don't do it advice, the first rule of murder would be don't get caught. The second, for Will, was no innocent victims. At least, not in his mind- it largely depends on what can be viewed as innocent-- anyway, the point is, the idea of blindly playing coin toss with the next body that's going to drop made an alarm go off. *Could he really justify that to himself?*

Yes. The answer was yes. It would probably provide that same feeling of plunging your hands into cold, oily dishwater at first, but something new, a new sensation, would distract him for a while. Hopefully, help him.

After all: distraction is the art of life.

The next weekend, he acted on this idea. Since the weather had tried to move against him, wind picking up to drag rain in with it, he wrapped up warm, said goodbyes to the pack, and started walking. Will walked about an hour until he came upon route 267, one of the primary state highways, and stepped over the boundary to walk along the outer edge of the road, toward traffic. He continued for a good half an hour, checking his watch made difficult in the rapidly declining light of dusk.

Every time a car came past, he'd stick out his thumb, or waved, but, every time, they wouldn't stop. Maybe it was a long shot to hitchhike- did anyone do that anymore? It definitely hadn't been popular since the seventies, mainly because of-- *subsequent murders*. Huh. Reviving old trends, and all.

A four-by-four with a family inside did stop for him, to his surprise. A big, bearded man, at least a couple decades older than him, smiled and asked if he was headed their way, and Will stuttered. He met the wide eyes of an older teenager and two young children in the backseat; a caramel-coloured terrier dog in the passenger seat with its little paws on the armrest. Apologising, brushing off the man's offer to take a detour, he couldn't help but smile as the little girl waved at him as they drove away.

Dusk rolled over into dark, and it wasn't until headlights started appearing like bright eyes on the horizon, did he hear a car grumble to a stop in front of him.

Will hadn't even gestured, getting fed up and about to walk all the way home- he'd taken to standing dejectedly under a streetlight on one of the road bends, on the verge of losing his patience. Confused, Will raised his head to see-- *what the fuck?* Is that a *Bentley*? Taking a moment to ask himself if he valued his own life more than that of the car in front of him, he went over to it.

He found that he wasn't comforted *at all* by the face that greeted him when the window came down: "Going my way?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Will thanked him, but didn't ask his name. Didn't say anything else, and quietly waited, fiddling with the folding knife in his pocket, hands nervously sweating in his gloves.

Discomfort? Check. Pointed objects? Check. Too many questions? Check.

This basically counts as a first date. Right?

Classical music, that Will didn't have the trained ear to recognise, was playing on the car radio. Whatever it was, it was less *A Clockwork Orange* and more *A High School Opera Trip*, and it reminded him of a thesis about psychopathy, and the links to Hip Hop over stereotypical instrumental classics. Instead of being comforted that the man's mental stability wasn't to be judged on his music taste, it was fucking unnerving. That unsettled feeling only fuelled by the rain that started to pelt the car at some point, the noise of windscreen wipers- it could make anyone feel claustrophobic.

But it did help to ameliorate the lack of conversation- he'd told him he was trying to get somewhere other than here, and he was more than willing to drop him off at a bus station, or something of the like, on his way back to Baltimore. Will thanked him, but didn't ask his name. Didn't say anything else, and quietly waited, fiddling with the folding knife in his pocket, hands nervously sweating in his gloves. His thoughts leaked and thrummed in tune with the engine.

He'd initially realised that anyone rich enough to own a Bentley probably wouldn't be willing to crash it, even if a knife was pressed to their throat. Truthfully, Will couldn't tell if-- "What leaves a man like yourself out hitchhiking at this hour?" --he'd realistically be able to take on the man in a one-to-one fight, if it came to that. He scowled when he caught up with the question.

"What do you mean by *man like yourself*?"

He was shot a sidelong, considerate glance, which he looked away from. The man wet his lips: "Well-groomed, clean, attractive. You aren't homeless, and you seem aware enough." He checked the review mirror, and shot a look his way once more, an intrigued one this time, "Is normal for you to get into stranger's cars at night, travelling nowhere in particular?"

Will scoffed, "No, it's not."

That seemed to draw a pleased response, eager to make conversation, "Do you have a name, then?"

"Yes."

Out of the corner of his eye, Will saw him quell a smile, amused. He didn't get what was so funny. When Will didn't give a real answer, turning away slightly to look out the window, he continued, "I'm known by my patients as Doctor Lecter, but you can call me Hannibal. You are?"

In a blur of movement, all too quick, Hannibal felt a curved blade pushed flush against the thin skin of his throat, just under his jaw. Will was properly looking at him then, grip on the weapon tight, glare fixed and dark. Hannibal merely adjusted his grip on the steering wheel. Will partly withheld a sigh in response, feigning indifference at how little Hannibal's demeanour changed- if at all.

"I take it introductions aren't your forte."

"I take it you get threatened with knives often." Will countered, and Hannibal's mouth did the strange little quirk again that implied a smile, but didn't answer. He quirked a brow, mocking: "Don't you *value* your life?"

Hannibal appeared thoughtful, but otherwise neutral, "I'm afraid I didn't realise asking your name would warrant such a reaction."

"It doesn't seem to bother you." It was certain whether he meant it as a statement or a question, or if it was just an observation. Hannibal turned a corner smoothly, not once taking his hands off the wheel.

"That you might kill me? Try to do so whilst in a moving vehicle, to the driver of that vehicle?" He gave Will a cursory glance, trying and failing to rattle him. His eyes gave away his disappointment: "I don't think the outcome would be the one you hoped for. For either of us."

"Just try not to break sharply." Will quipped, surprised at himself with how much wit he managed to conjure up; the anticipation of it all must've been getting to him, overriding any residual anxiety.

It threw him for a loop at how relaxed Hannibal was about the whole thing. Maybe he assumed death was below him: he wouldn't do something as pedestrian as *die*. Will wanted to-- change his mind about that.

"Where are we going to go?" Hannibal's tone was outstandingly mild, expression shadowy and skull-like. Will could hardly make out the whites of his eyes in the caverns of his sockets, depthless in darkness, the waves of light from the motorway now gone.

"You don't think I have a plan?"

Hannibal quirked an invisible brow, "Do you?"

"Not one I'll allow you to predict." He seemed... *content* with having a sharp edge pressed to the flesh over his artery, and hadn't made any move to change it. Being a doctor possibly

meant he wasn't stupid enough to fight back, but Will was under no illusion that he couldn't.

"Why did you choose a knife?" Hannibal asked, conversationally, like he wasn't about to be murdered.

Will kept his eyes on the road, planning a route, trying his hardest not to analyse the man, and his own morality- not until afterwards, at least: "Stop asking fucking questions." He huffed, "Turn left here."

Hannibal did as he was told. But then carried on talking, as if uninterrupted, "The majority of people would use a gun, if they wanted to kill a stranger. It would be far easier to gain a bigger reaction of fear from whomever faces its barrel. Quick, in every aspect. It would supposedly be more of a thrill." Will found himself listening, even if a bit preoccupied; weirded out at why Hannibal wasn't more so: "Knives are modest- they're unmarred by a sole purpose." It was said with clarity belonging far more to a therapy session.

Will began feeling genuinely uncomfortable, so Hannibal had to move his chin up when the added pressure on his skin threatened to break. He made a gesture to a turning, down a rural lane, trees either side like sedentary platoons of soldiers making it look unfathomably dark. Will's voice was calm, as if he was simply offering directions, without any insidious motive whatsoever: "Go down there."

Obliging, Hannibal adjusted the line in his shoulders. Will didn't mistake it for unease. The movement could've actually been likened to excitement, "Why choose such an intimate weapon?"

"Pull the car over, Hannibal."

He did so, and met Will's gaze placidly and entirely, the engine still thrumming. Then, he appeared to understand something, like it had shifted in the air between them, telepathic- it provided a tilt to his head and a glint to his eye. The yellow glow of the headlights bounced back off the trunks of the trees and illuminated them both. Hannibal's words were on the precipice of sounding concerned: "Have you done this before?"

It occurred to Will that *this isn't fucking working*.

No fear, no pleading, not even a good fight, for fuck's sake. He can't catch a break. People usually have question, yeah, but not ones expressing their distaste at *which weapon they'd prefer he slit their throat with*. It's- preferably- along the same sort of things you see happen in movies, of *I don't wanna die! Why are you doing this? Please, let me go!* but that wouldn't happen with Hannibal, he could tell. He gave off an air of superiority that wasn't a veneer as they so often are.

Will believed it.

Hannibal wasn't afraid of him and wasn't afraid to die. But, as reluctant as he was to admit it, Will didn't want to kill him. He found him-- *interesting*. Plus, he was hoping for a new experience, wasn't he? *Was this not new?* It certainly wasn't what he *expected*.

Perhaps it was better than a new, dead face, haunting his subconscious like a swarm. Someone paying him positive, genuine attention was pretty rare- *even in a scenario like this?* *Who the fuck does that?* Will was unwilling to acknowledge how he felt about it.

"Yes." He replied, sighing again but otherwise deadpan. Cold.

Hannibal mirrored his expression, only betrayed by the curiosity apparent in his look, growing intense with every passing moment, like being the eye of a storm. Will briefly thought that he might have to kill him anyway, just for staring. His gaze somehow felt loud in the leathery stale air of the car. When he spoke, his accent was thicker, his words weighted with it: "Have you heard of the Chesapeake Ripper?" Will shifted, accommodating the question.

"Yeah... why?"

"I was just curious," A pause, his face inscrutable and deceptively affectless, "To know if you'd heard of me."

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Images of tearing out Will's throat with his teeth, sinews of flesh and cartilage between them, all the blood hot and sticky, going from one throat to another. The thought was intrusive, cloying wetly the walls in the dark corners of his mind like an unfocused reel of old film.

Will needs to watch out! Hannibal needs to watch out! Nobody panic (or kill each other)!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal found Will familiar. Abstractedly, like a mirror he'd looked into decades ago.

He watched as disbelief flashed across his drawn features in waves, rippled, stilled, his expression unyielding. Without the bitter smell of fear, or any meagreness to him at all, Will took the knife away from Hannibal's neck, slowly, then, sustaining eye contact, he flicked it shut. Will eyed Hannibal with caution, as was wise, but he didn't seem threatened. It was-- *perplexing*. Whether it was a display of trust, mutual understanding, or just a red herring to distract him, Hannibal was pleasantly interested by it. By him. More so than he was by most people.

Still, it went unsaid that Will was prepared to strike out at any time, and was about as predictable as an untameable, feral creature- but he didn't need to be on the defensive. Despite revealing himself, Hannibal wasn't omitting control. And he wouldn't have to regain it by doing something sloppy, messy, that would get the interior of his pristine car ruined. His suit, too. He was never *that* reckless. Or so he told himself.

"They've given you a name. The Chesapeake Ripper has a ring to it, I'll give you that." Will offered, tone somewhat condescending, like nothing mattered to him. Nothing he held sacred, or feared enough to. He considered Hannibal intensely. Then looked away, to the trees, waiting for things to stir in the dark slithers between the trunks, "I don't know if it's better or worse to remain nameless." He didn't sound sad, just pensive.

Hannibal was a little taken aback by how his revelation hadn't hit its mark, "You haven't given yourself a name. Not to me."

"How can I *possibly* trust you?" Will scoffed, laughing a little in disregard of the danger he was most likely in, "How do I even *know* you are who you say you are?"

"You can't." Narrowing his eyes minutely, "Just the same as I can't trust you."

"Unless you prove it." He challenged, raising his eyebrows, innocently, not quite suggesting a demonstration (definitely not involving himself) but the feeling behind his gaze sordid.

"Unless I prove it." Hannibal conceded, voice low, "We can both trust in the fact that the other can't go to the police, at the very least. Accusation will lead to implication. Neither of us would want to be investigated."

"It's a catch-22." Will agreed, seemingly resigned. He wanted to be able to call bullshit. He really did. But this man had given him his full name, his occupation, his fucking license plate number, if he wanted it. Being so exposed, Hannibal didn't have a reason to lie.

But, through his honesty, Hannibal now had reason to kill him.

Will wasn't as worried about it as he thought he'd be: "How do I know you won't? Kill me, I mean."

"If I had wanted to, I already would have."

"This isn't a prime place." Will argued, but was met with a small but knowing smile, not quite showing teeth.

"I'd advise you take my word for it." Was all he offered, leaving Will feeling rather naïve. In the same way as a wolf remains naïve towards a lion.

"Fine." Will sighed, partly musing over what his gravestone would read, and sat back in his seat slightly. The situation would be comedic, if his life wasn't at stake- more importantly: *his dogs*'. That thought willed him to speak: "Give me something to help me believe that."

Hannibal put his hand back on the wheel, and Will didn't particularly care where they went next. Hopefully somewhere with streetlights. If not, barrel-rolling out of the car was always a nice option: "I will. If you give me your name." *Stubborn bastard*.

Maybe he understood Will's motive from the start- an animalistic, innate ability, like being capable of recognising his same scent on another. The same curve to his shoulders, a glazed, blank look in his eye, the same restlessness. But he wasn't as subtle with it, if you knew the language.

Hannibal always appeared stoic and curiously ambiguous to ignorant strangers. Revered, at the extreme. Will's exhaustion was too obvious. He lacked stability. Intelligent, perceptive, emotional- all shared attributes on different matters of degree. Hannibal understood Will to be volatile as easily and immediate as seeing his face, the thin cracks of his real self slipping through. *Spilling*.

Giving Hannibal what he wanted seemed like a bad idea. It struck Will that he probably didn't hear *no* very often, judging by all the authenticity and obvious wealth. And if he did hear no, it was probably during the final, pleading moments that come when you end someone's life.

Some weird, unsettling form of nostalgia hit him when a feeling rose in his throat like bile. When he was young, merely a kid, he would throw leftover food out the window for the jackals which skirted around outside one of the many motel rooms he and his father would frequent. He'd do it secretly- knowing that if he was caught, his dad would yell at him again; words crystal clear in his reminder that *when you feed these things, they will come back*.

The third time he'd been scolded for it, he cried. Weeping of how he hadn't wanted them to die in such a horrible way, unaware of any kindness; of the help that he could've given them.

He didn't feel that way now. Not for Hannibal; he knew his actions were wrong, and was entirely culpable. Malicious in his intent. If what Hannibal said was true, they'd be tangled up in this together anyway. No matter what. Whatever it was or would be. At this point, *what is there to lose?*

Another sigh resounded louder, the fleeting clench to his jaw not entirely unnoticed: "Will. Graham." Hannibal looked to him, as if assessing whether the name fit, switching gears. He seemed contented, finally.

"I much prefer it to a knife," He concluded, pulling back into the road, back the way they came: "And Will: I promise that I won't kill you." That, and no hint of lying, allowed Will to calm down, exhaling a breath when Hannibal added, "And I always keep my promises." *Okay, that was ominous.* Suddenly he didn't feel *as* calm, but it was better than before.

All in all, if he did go back on his word, the fight would be a good one. Hannibal wasn't about to underestimate him, and Will was already oddly aware of the threat Hannibal could pose: "How do I know that you're unarmed?" Will thought aloud, watching headlights and waving trees run past them.

"The human body is very durable, and more than competent; we can never truly be *unarmed*, Will." Will wanted to roll his eyes at the response, but decided not to, smiling despite himself. He'd already begun using his name in sentences like he owned it, or knew him well enough to. As weird and ostentatious as the guy was- ignoring the fact that they were both apparently serial killers, and the man was wearing an stupidly expensive red and black suit made of *Italian fucking wool*- Will liked him.

"And if you literally had no arms?"

Hannibal spared him another glance, a little too long to be considered road safe. Images of tearing out Will's throat with his teeth, sinews of flesh and cartilage between them, all the blood hot and sticky, going from one throat to another. The thought was intrusive, cloying wetly the walls in the dark corners of his mind like an unfocused reel of old film, "I would find a way."

Will hummed, only just audible from the mellow tides of string instruments and the rumble of the car, "If you're trying to distress me, I don't think it's working." He stated, not looking over at him.

"I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable." Hannibal affirmed, which didn't help Will's low-level discomfort.

"And if you were?"

"You'd be observant enough to notice."

Will let minutes pass by in silence, mulling everything over, not wholly dissatisfied with the outcome of the night's events. The car took an exit, but Will didn't catch the road sign.

It reminded him that the night's events were far from over.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, where do you think you're going, hmm?

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

"Where are you taking me, exactly?"

"Somewhere at which I can prove my word."

Oh, fuck.

Hannibal is a man of his word, and Will is a man of his anxiety.

After a while, Will recognised whereabouts they were. The sky had become a starless black, and houses lit by the yellow-orange light of the city stood tall against it, the thin trees along the sidewalk looking gangly and veinlike. He'd never actually been to the more la-de-da, upperclass part of Baltimore, having only occasionally gone downtown to the bars or clubs to coax out the nighttime scum that resided there. He could see Hannibal being at home here, but it would be-- misleading. Specious like a red-lipped toothy mask concealing a snarl. He'd live muzzled here.

"Where are you taking me, exactly?"

"Somewhere at which I can prove my word."

Oh, fuck.

Well, he figured this would happen sooner or later. Y'know, dying. By whoever's hand, maybe even his own, and he probably deserved it by now, huh? He didn't believe in heaven and wouldn't get there if he did. Guess that promise meant nothing- more fool him for even considering it to be true.

Time to start making peace with his inevitable demise. All the pain and suffering that would undoubtedly bookend the act itself. *Fucking fantastic*. Looks like his dogs would die too, all in a disappointing and non-dramatic way. They didn't deserve that, but he was helpless wasn't he? Woe is him. He'll die mercilessly and it'll be gross. He might even shit himself. *Fuck*.

"I thought I'd show you something," Hannibal noted, snapping Will out of his realisation that maybe there is no caramel core to life. He turned a sharp corner, "If you're happy to indulge me."

Unsure whether it was a question or a test, Will kept his mouth shut. Hannibal would make good on the assurance even if Will hadn't yet decided if he really wanted to see it- partly because, yeah, he was warming to him and curiosity is a sly creature, but also *hell* no; it certainly wouldn't be smart to make friends with fellow murderers. Namely the prolific, more brutal ones. *Or maybe it would?* It's always good to have someone share your interests...?

God knows what he was getting himself into.

They pulled up to a big beige house with wide, dark windows that somehow managed to look gaunt. Angular, the same sharpness as Hannibal's face. It wasn't inconspicuous, but it seemed to fit into the neighbourhood just fine, considering how affluent it all was. Most of the area occupied by the moneyed fat cats of shady business industries, or undeserving, rickety families surviving on inheritance, all living the jet set life- by the looks of it. Will rightly assumed they all were patrons of the arts and fine dining and wine tasting. He found the idea enviable and fucking tragic at the same time.

Without waiting for Will to be able to ask anymore questions, Hannibal got out of the car, walked around it, and opened Will's passenger door for him. He was taller and broader standing up straight and backlit by the city, threatening, but Will got out just the same. Outside of the car, Will felt even more out of place. The atmosphere of the Bentley was bad enough on it's own, but now he just felt wrong. To any of these people, he was a dirty, dirty peasant. And it's exactly what he felt like.

Hannibal closed and locked the car, and led a hesitant Will up to the front door. Being guided inside felt like being pointed in the direction of a set bear trap or a land mine, and happily wandering over to it without incident. Going into a lion's den. He let his jacket, and the knife within it, be taken from him and put on the coat rack; he stared at the pocket for a long moment, but did nothing.

His back wasn't turned to Hannibal for very long as he was herded into the house, keeping him in his peripherals, as untrusting and wary as anyone would be- similar to a stray dog, the quiet aggression. After all, he hardly trusted himself; he wasn't about to give another supposed murderer the benefit of the doubt when it came to honesty. Criminals are notorious liars. *People* are notorious liars. He didn't want to trust him.

The inside of the house was an enclave, decadent and rich with deep, royal colours, starkly obvious as to whom it all belonged. Entirely Hannibal's domain- every inch of space, every shadow- and it left Will with hardly any room to breathe. He was pretty sure Hannibal could see past his thin veneer of resolve, undoubtably witnessing his simmering panic. Perhaps he wanted to wait and see how it would reveal itself.

Will wouldn't give him that satisfaction- keeping his hands pushed deep into the pockets of his trousers, appearing colder. Meeker. Hannibal's eyes on him felt far too warm.

Following behind him to what appeared to be an overzealous dining room, Will found it hard to listen as Hannibal spoke, taking in all the glossy decorative bones, stuffed stag and boar heads, and pungent smell of herbs: "If you've encountered people who you have greeted the same way you greeted me, I presume I'm not going to show you anything you haven't seen

before, Will." Sure, he could guess that he was basically asking *hey, do you wanna see a dead body?* and Will wasn't about to say no, not after all this.

"Would you prefer to scare me?" Will asked, a quirk to his brow, deceptively doe-eyed.

Hannibal shot him a half-smile from over his shoulder, unlocking a door to the pantry, "Do you want to be scared?" Will watched the broad expanse of his back as he took off his suit jacket and hung it up on the end of a wine bottle in the rack. Turning, he looked down to the floor, fiddling with his sleeves. Will watched at his hands. *Being scared could be nice*, he thought, *fear is a powerful motivator*.

When Will was hardly paying attention to what Hannibal was looking at, distracted by a glass cabinet with vacuum-packed slabs of meat, he moved quickly and opened up the floor. A concealed trapdoor gave way to a dark staircase, looking too deep to be measured. The rationality in Will tried to send out blaring alarms about how terrible of an idea it is to go into a confessed killers house, let alone the fucking basement.

Hannibal looked to him with that steely indifference and Will insisted, "After you." The response was something that could've been a bow- a subtle nod to his head in concession- and he descended the stairs with catlike grace. Will dithered for a moment, looking to the cooking equipment and bottles and the discarded suit jacket, imagining kicking the door shut and locking Hannibal down there... but then followed him, strangely unbothered by being unable to see him at all anymore.

Halfway down, and the lights were turned on, flickering to life one-by-one. Plastic sheets were draped from the ceiling before Hannibal, reflecting the cold, medicinal glow, similar to suspended water. The room beyond it was blurred and distorted like a drawing done with the wrong hand, but ominous all the same. Cautiously, Will stopped next to him, not looking at his face. He sensed when Hannibal turned to admire his profile. Without another word, he parted the plastic with one hand and gestured Will to enter with the other.

The area was well-lighted, but still allowed shadows to lurk in corners or behind walls to give a sense of it being cavernous. Plastic hung everywhere, catching the light in the wrong places and making the room feel uneven, unstable. A dark doorway here, a steel table there: conjoined things to give the place an unsettlingly medical feel. It felt like a pseudo-surgery room; reminiscent of makeshift operating theatres criminal masterminds have on those FBI shows Will had watched in college. But it was real. And disconcerting to say the least.

The centrepiece, caged in by plastic, was what looked like an animal carcass suspended on a meat hook. The skin looking rubbery and thick, well-preserved. Aged. There was no smell, no flies, no blood.

It was too clean.

After a long moment of just staring, Will understood it to be a headless and armless human body, hook through it's ankle, gutted and parted down the middle from sternum to groin, just like a spit-roasted pig. He swallowed thickly.

He'd seen worse, but *God*, he didn't expect it to be so-- startling. So on-the-nose. It made the nerves in the pit of his stomach converge, resurfacing the want of his pocket knife safely tucked into his palm. The shapes of the exposed ribs and glistening flesh on the inside of the body were fractured by the light and translucent sheets separating it from Will, from Hannibal. Vague nausea hunkered low in his stomach, either born from thrill or fear, not reaching up to his throat.

He found that he couldn't bring himself to look away.

Quietly, Hannibal observed Will from behind him, and thought of how he could hook an arm around Will's neck and pull his feet off of the floor until he choked.

As if sensing the idea, Will turned to face him, "If other people have seen this, have they lived to tell the tale?"

Hannibal smiled properly this time, "It often leaves any guests quite speechless."

Will breathed a laugh, sounding rather like a scoff, the tension in his shoulders subsiding. The plastic crinkled and wobbled as he parted it to move up onto the centre of the room on a raised platform, keeping away from the flayed body. A familiar smell of meat was clammy in the air, the metallic tinge of blood wafting to him now and again.

When he started talking once more, Hannibal began pacing slowly around him like a prowling beast against cage bars. The footsteps softly echoed against the walls. As did their voices: "I wouldn't think this coincides with your Hippocratic oath, Doctor." He could tell Hannibal was amused even if his face became unfocused and disrupted through the sheeting, "Ethicality concerns, and all that."

"You're concerned about the welfare of my patients?"

"Of *course*." He intoned, staring at a spot of dried blood on the floor by his feet, shifting his gaze from the living man, to the dead.

"What makes a person ethical isn't what they choose to do. The line between thought and action determines whether or not that person is still a decent and upstanding human being." Will shot him a disbelieving look and he pretended not to notice, "Maybe, until action is taken, they don't know what they want themselves." He stopped to stand in front of Will, his face like a skull, "Or even who they truly are."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

"Why hide for so long between killings?"

Hannibal was a tad thrown by that, "To preserve something, you have to forbid it's decomposition."

Tread carefully, Will, you're in a cannibal's cheeky meat murder basement. Not a time to play silly buggers.

Chapter Notes

Oh, just a slither of insight for you into Hannibal's thoughts at one point during this: y'know Hannibal waits for like a couple of years between the Chesapeake Ripped killings, and kills his victims in sounders of three?

Y'know how he killed the guys that killed Mischa?

Consider your mind blown, you're welcome.

Will paused, considering the weight of his words: "Am I supposed to say something to that?"

"Would you like to?" Hannibal's expression was so resolute and devoid of emotion, Will didn't quite know how to feel. The tone of his voice seemed far too much like a therapist, and it made Will want to scratch an itch he didn't have.

"I think you're right. I'm not sure what point you're trying to make."

He inclined his head in the same way Will had seen his dogs do: "Do I have to be making a point?"

"Why say it otherwise?" Breaking eye contact, Will moved away from the humid scent of the preserved flesh, pushing through the sheets and wandering over to the various shiny

cupboards and shelves lining the walls. Hannibal didn't move to follow him, but his voice sounded close.

"I believe you've understood my position." Will looked back at him, to the body, and turned away, "Who I am; as I have been known." Hannibal didn't sound smug when he said it, just... dangerous. It was something on the line between a threat and imposition; tightrope walking there. No doubt that he was completely aware of his capabilities, and his control.

Control is an essential part of this. Surgical knowhow, precision, elegance infused in his wrath- he was a Doctor. Shockingly unassuming, though. Presented with the facts, it seemed as if the Feds were missing a trick, but Hannibal was weirdly, at the same time, the most and least likely person to have a hobby of murdering people. He was creative, in a bizarre, convoluted way- the garish decoration of his house seemed too saccharine now, covering over a secret. Thin white paint concealing blood stains, the claret appearing if you knew where to look.

"Loud and clear." Will's understanding of the Ripper aligned nicely with his understanding of Hannibal. It made *sense*. Stewing over it all, he recalled the fleeting anxious whisperings of people huddled together in bars; gossip rife whenever that name disrupted the calm like something rotting on the surface of a placid lake. Will frowned: "Why hide for so long between killings?"

Hannibal was a tad thrown by that, "To preserve something, you have to forbid it's decomposition."

"That didn't answer my question."

Hannibal inclined his head, "I'm not about to make it a weekly occurrence, as that would spoil the enjoyment. Sour the fruit of my labour."

"...Neither did that." He just blinked at him, unlikely to be swayed to answering. Will huffed, making a note to unlock his tragic backstory at some point, "You're not denying *enjoyment*?"

"Why should I have to? In turn, why would you? Unless you see it as a fatal flaw."

Will heard the clicking sound of his own teeth gritting, "I wouldn't deny it if it were the case." He was pleasantly surprised when Hannibal didn't comment on it.

Seeking advice from the Chesapeake Ripper seemed pretty apt. Being around the hands and eyes behind that title was enough to make anyone's skin crawl.

Not to say he wasn't surprised. It isn't everyday you put a face to a name that's often among the FBI's most wanted. Quite a privilege, really.

Although, he could easily become a name among the list of victims; he was in the palm of the man's hand. But he hadn't closed his fist. Will scrubbed a hand across his face, trying to calm himself down, wondering how on earth he'd get out of this situation without a scratch on him. And *why*?

"You don't need to be so on edge, Will. I keep my promises." Christ almighty.

"In these circumstances, a reaction of stress is pretty understandable, don't you think?" It came out snappier than he intended. He sighed, apologetic; he knew it would be a bad idea to speak his mind. The niggling feeling to just outright refute his confessions and make a break for it would undoubtedly only surface as him telling him to fuck off, in an exasperated kind of way. But antagonising him was probably the stupidest thing he could do. Plus, wouldn't want to insult such a regal man by insinuating he's killed the people he most *definitely has killed*. That would be impeccably impolite.

Hannibal put his hands in his pockets- not making him appear any less formidable, somehow. Approaching him, he followed Will's worried gaze that had settled flatly in the middle-distance next to a buzzsaw. Harsh words and questions knotted themselves together in Will's throat, causing him to fidget, shuffle his feet, stuck at a complete loss as to where this will all go next. There was merely a step between them: "What do you want to say, Will?"

Will laughed a little at that, shaking his head, because *of course he saw right through him*. There was something left unsaid. Well, a lot of things, actually: what do you say to a very renowned serial killer, as a fellow serial killer? Congratulations? Big fan? Good job and a pat on the back?

Utterly resigned, Will hoped he'd gone mad and this was all a dream. He thought about touching Hannibal just to make sure, but thought better of it.

"I don't know." He breathed, smiling in spite of himself, too aware of the desiccated, torn corpse at his back, "If you tell people to fuck off when you're in your thirties, it gets you ostracised." Hannibal blinked, the only tell of vague reproach, "I'd imagine far worse would happen if I said that to you."

The response wasn't quite a sigh, but he left space for it, letting Will meet his gaze again: "Would that be denial or aggression?"

"I'm not grieving. Not even for myself." *Maybe a little bit*. He sighed again, "You've proven your word: now what?"

Hannibal raised his non-existent brows, eyes uncharacteristically brightened: "Dinner?"

Will found himself agreeing (again).

As he sat at the table, awaiting whatever had whipped up the intoxicating smells from the kitchen, Will became transfixed by the taxidermy whitetail that leered at him from across the room.

He imagined himself in it's place.

The doubts and tepid fear that had plagued him before he'd even left his own house, had now grown limbs and become independent of him. Escaping any logic trying to net them together and reign it all in, now churning amongst the acid in his stomach. It felt like he was bleeding, from somewhere, or-- taking on water he couldn't offload quick enough.

Staring into those glass eyes, cold and anonymising, Will reckoned he wasn't far away from becoming untethered. For an unearthly moment, he swore the stag blinked.

When Hannibal came back carrying plates, Will's mind resurfaced enough to look at the meal being placed in front of him: "Langoustine with pearl barley and baby leeks, a pig's head beignet, homemade mustard, and shaved black truffle."

"Pig's head?" Will asked, parroting the only thing he really paid attention to. He was caught staring as Hannibal poured an aged Riesling white wine into both their glasses, and took his seat. The attention only made Hannibal visibly lean in closer like he was magnetised to it.

"Pigs can represent many things. The Korean ritual of Gosa traditionally includes a boiled pig's head that is presented among a banquet, which guests supplement with money stuffed into its ears and mouth. It's served sliced with fermented baby shrimp. Such an event is often performed at a dramatic change in one's life- a business exchange, or the purchase of a new house. The animal represents good luck, and prevents misfortune from befalling the host."

Will considered it, abstractedly pacing a corner of his brain and reminding himself that he'd thought the flayed human corpse, too, was a pig.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

"I'm not going to sit down and be probed about my traumatic childhood, if that's what you're suggesting." A smile dented the corners of Hannibal's mouth.

Things get pretty cute for two serial killers, and they're about to get a whole lot cuter. (And by cuter, I mean violent.)

Chapter Notes

A long chapter! Buckle up! Soon there will be full-on dark Will, and hunting together, and surprises along the way. The usual Murder Husbands gig we all crave. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Needless to say, the presentation was more impressive than Will wanted to give him credit for, and once Hannibal had taken his first bite and looked to him for reciprocation, Will relented. It was unlike anything he'd tasted before. And it was divine. His eyes said it all, and Hannibal's expression warmed to be intimately appreciative in a nuanced, rehearsed adjustment to the angle of his head, "And you just happened to have this prepared?"

"Yes. It wasn't my intention to be sharing my evening, but I'm always open to guests." His pale lashes fluttered as he lowered his eyes, cutting and forking another bite with an odd accuracy; holding his cutlery like they were surgical instruments. He was dissecting his food the same way he dissected Will with his eyes alone. Will wondered if he innocuously did it to anything that roused his interest.

"What're you celebrating?"

"Currently or retrospectively?"

"So it's changed, then." Will said, between careful bites, "Am I supposed to be sharing in this celebration? Now that we're both in understanding, however unwitting."

"You haven't denied me." Hannibal countered, and at that, Will's eyes shied from his own. He ate another mouthful of food and prayed to choke, his thoughts convalescing to placate the sickly feeling of dread prickling his stomach.

"Is this just-- self-indulgence? I wouldn't mark you as someone inclined to be honest. Or selfless, for that matter." He expected to be met with that subtle, detached look he'd understood to be displeasure, but it didn't seem to mar Hannibal's otherwise serenely delighted expression. His effusive gaze was that only bestowed by a doctor, an artist, and a mother. Will only had experience of two of the three: "Why be so determined to prove yourself?"

"Are you posing an alternative?"

"You could just kill me, and save yourself the bother." The suicidal implication of the statement only became clearer to him after he'd said it.

Hannibal hummed minutely, and considered him, regarding him with what was close to desire when he continued eating, eyes locked together like rutting stag's antlers: "I told you I wouldn't harm you because of the rare circumstances we find ourselves in." A small sigh hung in the air again.

"Do you smell an opportunity on me? You've made me a witness, and that's equal to harm." Will took up his glass, taking a languid sip, enthralled by the way he was being watched. Hannibal stayed quiet, pensive, even as he put the glass back and righted his posture, "Associative guilt. You want something from me, or I wouldn't be sat here right now. I would have been feeding the scuttling creatures that lurk in the wood." He could picture it too, irksomely-- the crows pecking out his eyes, the damp of decay and dirt. Cold and bloated to the touch. Thousands of teeth of the insects burrowing into him.

Hannibal's teeth among them, he's sure.

"Could that analysis not be reversed?" Hannibal offered sharply, "I intended on killing you when I let you inside my car, much like you were equipped to do so to me. The blame isn't admissible, Will."

Will's knife scraped on his plate, "You've been hospitable."

"As you've been compliant." He spoke around a bite in the politest of ways, then swallowed. Will's expression hardened.

"I'm not trying to be accusatory, Hannibal." At the use of his name, his eyes changed. Will quirked a brow at him, more confident when engaged in conversation without omission, Hannibal noticed. His tone was calm but faintly ridiculing, as if Hannibal was the butt of an unidentified joke: "I just want to know why I'm *alive*."

Hannibal took the fork away from his lips again, and Will's glance lingered: "You're alive," He fixed him with a look, "Because you're in need of help."

"...Excuse me?"

"When I asked you if you're experienced in threatening others, even killing them- you said yes. Your answer was confirmed as truth when you saw what was in the basement."

"Why does that--"

"You were comfortable with a corpse being merely an arms-length away from you, Will. A corpse that you know was made so, by my hand." Hannibal held the stem of his glass but didn't raise it, his eyes boring holes into Will's, "Death is familiar to you. And you've allowed it to consume you."

After a pause, Will opened his mouth to speak, but found his reply not forthcoming in the wake of such candid truth. He was dumbstruck. Was it that he was that easy to read, or just that Hannibal was the right person to do so? Will looked back at him, a sincerity to his darkness, ungodly. And found he'd lost his appetite.

"Are you suggesting-- *therapy*?"

"It would be a poor career choice if I didn't." Will felt himself pale, "But it wouldn't be deemed official."

"It's not your medicinal duty to help out confessed killers, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal spoke centimetres away from the rim of his glass, thoughtfully, "Perhaps not." He watched the line of his throat as he swallowed. Gently, Will put his cutlery down onto his plate without finishing the last few bites.

"But you're offering to?"

"Yes." Disagreeing would kill him. Will was almost certain. Maybe not immediately, but eventually, in good time. He didn't doubt it for a second- seeing those maroon irises reflected in his own, and all the thoughts they housed behind them.

"I'm not going to sit down and be probed about my traumatic childhood, if that's what you're suggesting." A smile dented the corners of Hannibal's mouth.

"So a chaise lounge is out of the question?"

"Conventional therapy is out of the question. I don't want you inside my head." *Not another face to add to the pile*; kept, nestled inside his skull once discarded amongst teenage memories and flagrant, drunken nights. It was unsettling to think about. Like looking at glassy-eyed, discoloured faces submerged underwater, misshapen by the quivering light on the surface- seemingly formless, and mouldable. A cold feeling spread across the back of Will's neck.

Hannibal set down his own knife and fork, and moved to clear their places, "Unconventionality is more than acceptable." When he reached over Will to collect his plate, Will didn't curl away from his proximity, but it was a near thing: "It is what you and I understand."

Over a dessert of rosemary and orange posset that Will ate entirely and unintentionally, Hannibal spoke about his avocation of taxidermy- as he'd seen Will's eyes track back to the

deer head. In turn, Will briefly mentioned his passion for fishing. Both unassuming hobbies in any other setting made into red flags, really.

They both seemed rather telling.

The bottle of wine was almost empty, largely down to Will, in his panic to calm himself down. It gave him a reason not to talk too much. Hannibal felt that he'd probably allow Will to drink even his most expensive bottles, and wouldn't think them wasted on him: "Would you equate your enjoyment of fishing, to your enjoyment of killing?" Hannibal sprung the question so easily and suddenly Will almost got fucking whiplash: "Both involve the extinguishment of a life, and the suspense of the catch."

Will fidgeted, "Maybe. I like... knowing what to expect. Having a process, and getting foreseen, regular outcomes. It's why I didn't want to expand on my habits when-- *choosing* people. Until tonight." And look where that got him.

"Cyclical occurrences are a part of existence. It's understandable to find solace within the things we know, and that work well, subjectively speaking." Hannibal undid the last buttons of his jacket, "But you're right to experiment with those boundaries. Otherwise, I would be sat here alone."

Will watched Hannibal, perplexed by how different he felt now from seeing him for the first time. How, in one night, he'd met a stranger and accepted their food, their invitation, and their company. Their affections. Instead of accepting their blood and screamed pleading. Looking away, he supposed them both to be better for it.

"Is this beginning a new cycle?"

"Our lives intersecting is fortunate, Will. You were seeking a change, and I am willing to provide that."

"Psychiatric intervention isn't what I was hoping for." Will grumbled, drinking, still in the dark about what exactly Hannibal had in mind when he suggested it. And Hannibal's plans regarding him, in general.

"It would be a very loose use of the term."

"How so?"

"There would be far more practicality would be involved, and it wouldn't be financially funded by yourself. I wouldn't align it with my practice, or treat you as I would a patient, unless you feel as if that would benefit you." Hannibal shot him a glance, knowing and trite, and it struck Will like a revelation.

"You don't want to kill me. Because you want to kill *with* me."

Hannibal's fixed expression waned slightly, no longer appearing so inscrutable.

"Death is a possibility of change. Taking life- the thrill of it- is something we have both only experienced in solidarity." His eyes looked reddish when he narrowed them, "Even the most

skilled predators hunt in packs; the rarity of our meeting seems too good of an opportunity to forgo pursuing it any further." Will stayed silent, meeting his eyes and nodding once in passable agreement, if hesitantly.

Hannibal didn't blame him- everything that'd happened over the course of a single night was quite overwhelming, especially for a man who didn't even seem used to being around others.

Finishing up the meal, the conversation lulled into a pause long enough for Hannibal to voice a question Will had been mulling over: "I assume you have a home, Will? Do you intend on going back there tonight?"

There was something about the way he said it, something insidious, that made Will's answer come from him without thinking.

"Yeah." He said, sitting back in his seat, and draining the rest of his drink to calm his nerves. *Like Hell he was staying there.* And he didn't have enough money on him for a nearby motel, anyway, "I have to get back to my dogs." They always made for a great excuse, mainly with social events. And for avoiding sleeping in a known serial killer's spare bedroom, apparently.

"Allow me to pay for the cab." Will was about to brush him off with a furrow to his brow, but Hannibal rose from his seat, "A host always provides for his guest, Will. Besides: anymore hitchhiking could tangle you in all sorts of horrors." If Hannibal was anyone else, he would've probably winked. But opted for a quiet smile instead.

The ride home left Will with his thoughts, idly fiddling with the folded up blade still hidden in his pocket. He'd instinctually reached to it as soon as Hannibal had politely helped him back into his coat, his hand settling on Will's lower back as he saw him out the front door.

Will had felt himself lean into the touch.

Halfway into the journey, he stopped his mind racing as it was making him feel carsick, and tried desperately to think of his dogs, and his home, and the stream. His life without Hannibal involved at all, *before* any of this. A reprieve from his thoughts was only had in the short doze he took in the car, quickly woken by a jolt, recognising the shoddy road up to his cozy looking farmhouse, lit up against the dark sky. He was glad to have left the lights on. Coming back to a pitch-black room would've made him too paranoid- imagining the Chesapeake Ripper waiting to kill him around a corner, or standing behind him in an empty doorway; looking into his windows like the deer often do. He wondered if the dogs would actually protect him from such a thing happening, and if he could protect himself.

That night, Will doesn't dream. He wakes up and thinks of Hannibal.

His imagination in sleep, abandoned by reason, produces monsters as black as coal. And when united with them: he finally feels alive.

Next stop: Stalking.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Hannibal Lecter is real. The Chesapeake Ripper is real. He knows him.

You: he's stalking him.

Me, an intellectual: Lovingly Observing From A Distance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Winston huffed pointedly at Will as he ate a breakfast of scrambled eggs. He softly barked when he was ignored: "Hello?" Will looked down to him, then further down to the old, chewed-up fishing glove laying between his paws. He sighed.

His sleep had been disjointed and fraught with grotesque visions of future possibilities. Visions involving Hannibal, and his claw-like hands, and blood. Winston knew this, as he followed Will when he opened a window to breeze out the stuffiness of the room, caused by another night sweat. The attentive dog could smell his fear in the air like smoke. He sniffed and licked Will's bare legs to try to ameliorate his upset, grounding him a little, tasting salt on skin. It earned him a ruffle of his ears, and the instruction to go back to bed. Winston, reluctantly, did as he was told.

Will had also developed a habit, specifically at night, of reliving decades worth of regretful memories in high resolution. He wondered if his agreement to 'therapy' would be something he'd live to regret. Or if he'd live *to be able* to regret it.

Letting the dogs out into the crisp air of the late morning, Will sliced an apple with his pocketknife and ate it off of the blade. His mind kept creeping back and lingering around the smells of the meal he'd shared with Hannibal, and shallow-focused images of the hanging meat, flitting in his head like trapped starlings.

Eating the apple absently made him think of one stuffed into the mouth of a browned, wrinkled swine's head.

It was, strangely, a welcome relief.

Out of a multitude of reasons including boredom, Will decided to get in his car, and make the hour-long trip all the way to Baltimore. The day after they'd met, he realised he hadn't given Hannibal a way of contacting him, or getting to him. Not that he was asked for it. He supposed that was entirely intentional that he be the one to reconnect them; it wasn't as if he would take his chance and run, solely because he'd been given an incentive to return. Hannibal knew it, and he'd placed well on his bet, considering depressives are largely

unlikely to want to help themselves even if they are given means to. But he'd coddled Will purposefully and expertly. In doing so, he made him feel wanted. It was as easy as baiting a trap.

Will kept remembering the jackals, and crying so hard he could taste mucus on his gums.

The likelihood of Hannibal being home alone were slim, considering it to be a weekday, and the late afternoon. Fortunately, the good doctor's whereabouts were pretty simple to ascertain. Will researched him to see if he was who he said (mainly in regards to his doctorate) and quickly discovered the location of his office. It didn't take Will long to find it. That, and the unmistakable Bentley. *For a serial killer, he isn't one with a knack for subtlety.* Perhaps that was the point.

Will made no move to leave the warmth of his car. He sat across the street, parked neatly in between two other vehicles a good distance away, and watched the door to the building take people in, and spit them back out. No one of note, surprisingly. Even when a sleek limousine-like car dropped a woman off by the outer gates, Will averted his eyes and looked at his watch. It was slowly approaching five.

He'd observed Hannibal's comings and goings a few times now- every other day, for about a week. In truth, he couldn't really place what had given him the idea to do it. It was helping to solidify the fact that he hadn't dreamt the meeting, the entirety of the nights events- it wasn't a hallucinatory vision from a higher power, or some shit: *Hannibal Lecter is real. The Chesapeake Ripper is real.* He knows him.

It separated the depiction of him as a sateless murderer, and the clearer view of him being a human- a man doing his job, and buying groceries, and engaging in regular activities that regular people do. Watching him in isolation from this twisted, vastly incorporeal idea of him being this predatory and untamed thing that no one could yet name, made it all seem rather funny. Because Will *knew* his terrifying secret. *Knew* he had no shame, no regard for morality; seeing him dredged in normalcy and routine- supposedly *helping others*- was downright laughable.

Hannibal is a cataclysm of stupid contradictions.

To anyone else, Will's antics would look like some kind of stakeout. He'd look-- obsessive. The thought of going up and knocking on the door, or inviting himself in, had readily occurred to him, but he withheld the want to move into action. Not even tempted by breaking in, and sitting at his desk to spin around in the chair like a Bond villain.

An apt idea, actually, but potentially overly eager. Too dramatic for Will's tastes (although Hannibal probably wouldn't think of it as such, and even enjoy it) but something to revisit.

He watched the sky as it dulled with the blue light of dusk, and let down his car window to breathe in the odorous, chill air of the street. Gasoline fumes, the damp after rain soddening the ground, a whiff of a bakery or restaurant somewhere. He felt sorry for the small trees lining the sidewalk, for all this pollution. Nothing like Wolf Trap, being in the middle of nowhere. God, that made him want to be home with his dogs.

Will is nothing if not dedicated. Patient, even if fidgety, and he found it weirdly easy to sit in a car for a few hours and listen to the radio, merely watching. The seat was comfortable enough so nothing went numb, and he'd bought a bottle of water and some Chex Mix just in case, though he doubted he'd get hungry.

When the evening was in full-effect, the night brightened by painterly street lamps and headlights, the church beside the office building became awash in an ugly yellow light, casting long shadows up the stone walls. It was as if it had become sallow in anticipation for Hannibal's appearance, as Will recognised the shoe on the foot that came out of the door before he saw Hannibal's face.

Starting the temperamental engine, he pulled out of the parking space carefully, and inconspicuously drove past as the Bentley made way for itself amongst the traffic.

Hannibal's day had been long and arduous, having to endure bland, awkward talks of cheese, and falsify intrigue as a man told him about his faulty circadian rhythms. A patient cancellation had left him with ample time to draw, however, and he'd drawn Will. Facing away, as if disdainful, or blissfully unaware of observation.

Arriving home, he found the house to feel absent. Vacant, like it hadn't done in years. Something missing.

He prepared and ate a simple dinner of filet mignon with a balsamic glaze, baby red potatoes, and buttered asparagus. Of course, it wasn't beef. He savoured it, eating slowly despite missing lunch, but thought the Merlot could've been aged longer. Still, it was satisfying, and something he'd probably make again with minor tweaks.

At that time of night, it wasn't uncommon to hear the busied hubbub of the street, but usually his road was quieter than others. Halfway through stirring the mix for a panna cotta he heard a loud car horn outside, but thought nothing of it, not even glancing up or stopping his movements. Until it sounded again, two beeps in quick succession, and he stilled. With a gentle look of vexation, he covered the bowl in plastic and placed it in the fridge, and went to investigate.

It was pressed again, continuously, until he opened his front door, and past the gate stood Will, leaning against the door of his car with his arm inside on the steering wheel. His figure, limned by the streetlights and moon beyond, seemed almost threatening. But even in the poor light, Hannibal could make out his smile.

"Evening." Will called out to him, and Hannibal had to school his expression to not appear fond. The bite of the night's air thrilled against the skin of his bared forearms.

"Will. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Call it... returning favours." Hannibal angled his head, and allowed himself to smile.

"Courtesy?"

Will huffed a laugh, "I am capable of independent thought, Hannibal. Besides, you showed me yours, so I'll show you mine? But you're not getting dinner." He punctuated it by opening the car door and getting in, pausing to appreciate Hannibal looking rightly surprised in his doorway. It made the waiting worth it, "Go get a coat. You look as if you've seen a ghost."

Chapter End Notes

Don't you just love Winston? Underrated character if I've ever heard one.

I wonder what they'll do at Will's house.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

He sighed again, heavily, "Considering your greater experience, I don't expect," Creative charge? Input? "Freedom."

Hannibal meets Winston. Winston doesn't like him. But Will does, quite a bit, and it's only getting worse.

Chapter Notes

Keep an eye out for subtle indications of their growing desire for one another. Ugh they're so GAY.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I will warn you that when new people meet the dogs, they can be, uh-- just, not all of them will be pleased to see you." Will stammered, hearing their yips and snuffling from the house as they got out of the car. The ride over had been mostly comfortable silence, marked only by Will's apologies that they weren't in a Bentley, briefly, when he caught Hannibal's very minute look of reproach when he saw some used tissues in the backseat. They'd exchanged glances, sometimes both at the same time, and Will had cleared his throat.

Emerging from the car, Hannibal breathed the fresh air deeply, and admired the house, "Should I be on my guard?"

"No, no. They won't bite, they'll just be strange. Keep your distance." Will instructed, slinking a key into the door.

"I'm sure I can handle a few upset dogs." *A few* didn't count for *seven*, and when they all came bursting out of the door, Hannibal seemed to be pretty startled, and simply took his hands from his pockets to let them sniff him. Will thought it looked like surrender, and privately smiled, stroking the whiskery muzzles and big paws of the ones tall enough to jump up at his waist. The braver ones, specifically Buster, instantly took a shine to the new guest, and actually scratched at Hannibal's trouser leg as he was being practically swamped in dog hair, and spit, and thumping tails on the backs of his legs.

"Sure about that?" Will offered, then allowing the shepherd dog, Max, to go over and characteristically try to jump up on Hannibal's coat that probably cost more than all of the furniture in his home. He decided to be merciful, and with a quick whistle, they were all on

his heels instead as he moved inside and flicked on the lamp as he went, "There's your welcoming party, then."

"Who's this?" Hannibal asked, and Will had to crane his neck back on his way to the kitchen to see Hannibal forcibly stopped in the front doorway, a reddish mutt standing possessively in front of him.

"That's Winston. He's harmless." Being fixed with the unwavering stare, and the lean of his stance, Hannibal would beg to differ. He would've crouched down, but doubted it would've made him any more appealing to approach. But, when Winston heard the clattering of food into their tin bowls, he slunk away, still eyeing the stranger in his home, "I didn't think a bunch of strays would scare you, Doctor Lecter." Will said, quite amusedly, coming back into view.

"They don't scare me; I used to have a much larger dog as a boy. Horses, too." Will nodded once in acknowledgement, but didn't think it safe to ask much more about it. But he did seemed like the kind of man to get on well with horses, for some reason. Clicks of claws on wood came back into the room, audible sniffing, and Hannibal's eyes flicked to it: "But they are uncertain of me," He said, leaning down slightly to stroke one of their necks, and looking back up at Will, "A lack of certainty can lead any creature to violence. Defensive or otherwise."

Hannibal never wilted to say such well-disguised deductions, Will noticed. He just said them. With purpose, and boundless, intellectual clarity; no longer opposed by fear of unsettling anyone in the process. The words were always weighed right- his tone, too- even though these things would be unacceptable to Will if said by anyone else, in any other way, without that warm accent and caring look to his eye.

Will blinked at him, and dropped his gaze away to the half bottle of liquor standing on his desk. He wordlessly collected two tumblers from the cabinet and poured them a glass each, passing it to Hannibal once he'd shouldered off his coat and hung it up.

"It can also lead to doubt." Will suggested, sipping, "Instability- even within yourself. Even large trees can succumb to unseen fungus."

"A lack of conviction is, in turn, a lack of control. Do you feel in control, Will?" Will didn't answer which, regardless, spoke volumes: "You definitely have control of these dogs. I would think they'd do anything for you."

"Yeah," He mused, hit with something akin to being proud of his little gathered family. It sounded like Hannibal meant something nefarious by the way he said it, but he sounded like that almost all of the time. Will glanced between the animals milling around them both, replying with a small, fond smile at the underbite-smile of the shitzu scratching her ear by his feet.

"Dogs are adaptable. As must we be." Hannibal noted, straightening back up. Will didn't know what to say it that.

"Please, sit." Will sat down in one of the leather chairs by the window and then pointed with his glass to the seat opposite. Hannibal sat felinely and crossed one leg over the other- peculiarly less severe without a suit jacket but not underdressed. Silently scenting the drink before tasting it, Will watched curiously as he wetted and pursed his lips afterwards, momentarily enthralled by the shape of them.

"Is this a consensual kidnapping, Will?" That made him laugh then, a sharp, light sound like a chortle. Hannibal gave him a look like he'd died inside years ago, but the rot hadn't reached the outside yet.

"*Why* would you think that?" Stupid question, but if Hannibal had merrily went along with being abducted by him, he probably deserved whatever it would be that Will would do to him.

"Why bring me out here?"

He withheld his smile, raised his eyebrows and his forehead creased, ocean eyes alluringly antipathetic, "I thought you'd like my dogs."

"You aren't trying to afford my validation, Will." Hannibal smiled a little with wry amusement, "Aren't we are far beyond that?"

"We were never even there." He admonished, dodging Hannibal's question like an animal rearing it's head to avoid a snare, "But my motivations aren't *always* beguiling, Doctor Lecter. You don't have to expect manipulation."

"If you can expect the manipulation, you can then avoid it." At that, Will only raised a brow in nonchalant agreement.

Will hadn't seen Hannibal talk to other people enough, he decided. The hard, rapt look seemed tailored to him but deeply sincere, unlike he'd ever been looked at before. He genuinely couldn't identify whether or not it was a calculated action. Or even, if he was consciously doing it.

The alcohol seared Will's throat when he took too much of a mouthful, "I'm showing you where to find me- as you did." Hannibal admired the room then. The dark corners, the fishing lures, the bed: "It's not everyday you get the Chesapeake Ripper welcoming you into his home with open arms. Then, letting you leave it again." Hannibal bowed his head fractionally, like you would if accepting a compliment, "It seemed-- *inadequate*, to not make it a level playing field."

"Are we on the same side?"

Will considered the glass in his hand, comparing the shade of the drink to the colour of Hannibal's eyes, "Think of it as..." He sighed quietly, thoughtful, "Two sides of the same coin."

Humming, Hannibal narrowed his eyes, the corners of his mouth lifting, "Is this meeting a preliminary to what we've discussed of your therapy?"

"Yes." Will confessed, after a moment, biting back the sting of the liquor that burned it's way down his oesophagus. The drink and the intoxication of Hannibal's presence made his head feel heavier: "Have you constructed a plan?"

"Some, yes. I assume you've thought more about it since we last spoke."

"Mmhm. If this will be a collaborative effort- I guess we'll have to collaborate." Will half-shrugged, draining the rest of his glass. All the while, Hannibal observed him with frightful enrapture.

"Indeed."

"Here would be a good place to do it. It's isolated enough." He supposed, casually refilling his glass halfway, "Any screams at night are dismissed to be the baying of foxes."

Hannibal swirled the ochre liquid in his glass, not taking his eyes away from Will: "Would you intend there to be screams?" Will's gaze didn't falter.

"I'd anticipate them, unless they're-- incapacitated." He sighed again, heavily, "Considering your greater experience, I don't expect," *Creative charge? Input?* "Freedom."

He thought about the Ripper killings and how brutally captivating they were; wet, hot organs deftly removed, whilst their hearts fluttered in their chests like a grasshopper caught in the hollow of your palms. He'd done something like it, only once. It was far more theatric than Will had acclimatised himself to being. Bolder. He could appreciate the liberation being with Hannibal would allow.

"How do you intend to do it, Will?" He asked, too obviously curious, "Am I to know what you want the design to be?"

Will supplied a gentle smile again, sly and overly fond from the pliancy of alcohol: "Yeah, I've got a few ideas."

Chapter End Notes

Something wicked this way comes. The wait for the next chapter will totally be worth it, I promise. The suspense must be agonising. I hope it lasts.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

"Fear entices. When a creature is frightened, it's usually bringing more attention to itself than it wishes; making it easier for the things it fears to seek it out."

Baby's First In-Group Murder. Bless.

Chapter Notes

Strap yourselves in, this is long and disturbing. It's gross. But, hey! Murder Husbands, here we come!

T/W: Amputation and graphic depictions of gore, imagined, and far too real.

Hannibal kept Will's ideas in mind, at least, the ones about who would be the victim, and the precautions, and the execution of the plan (pun intended). But he had been given the reigns on the events leading up to it. On the *how* aspect of it. Will had told him that he wanted to see him work, but stressed that it *wasn't some fucking apprenticeship*- that it would be a conjoined experience, and not something to bolster Hannibal's already encouraged ego. Hannibal, for his part, was entirely delighted by the prospect.

But when Will asked him when he was thinking would be the best time to do it- to hunt- Hannibal smiled slightly and said that he would get back to him on that.

And, boy, he was about to.

When the door clicked open, the dogs didn't run to greet Will. Instead, they only looked up at him, worriedly, from their places in their beds, then looked to the middle of the room. They were looking at a chair. Specifically, an unconscious person in the chair. Strapped to it.

Will's eyes tracked from the dogs, to the incremental rise and fall of the stranger's chest, to a dark face he could hardly see, but knew. A papery moth worrying around the lamp flickered in the corner of his eye. The feeble light illuminated the room just fine, and bounced off the plastic on the floor to make a thin, honey-coloured sheen that looked like water, or bile. He didn't want to look at the chair, particularly.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" He breathed, hanging up his coat, and taking a moment to hold both hands over his face to collect himself.

"Unfortunately not." Came the reply, from somewhere in the shadows, hidden like an unuttered thought. Will ignored it. He gestured with his hands and opened the door, whistling so all the dogs scampered out, one or two lingering in a state of bewilderment. The door closed with a thump. Will considered his hand on the doorknob, and sighed heavily.

To be fair, he'd expected Hannibal, given the unmistakable car parked in the driveway. He wondered if they needed to have another conversation, or that he'd come over to prepare him dinner based on his incapability to feed himself- or even, that he'd come to finally rid him of his existence, but not-- *this*. The scene laid out before him hadn't even crossed his mind. God knows why it hadn't.

"Did you have to?"

"Have to? No." Hannibal supplied, dull footsteps approaching him. With him being quieter, his accent thickened, and the pitch of his voice was grave and threatening. But, even then, Will wasn't scared: "Are you upset?"

"Not really." Will watched the little moth settle on the warmed lampshade as Hannibal moved closer, "It's just- inconvenient." He heard Hannibal inhale- the room being so silent- and estimated that there was barely a foot of floorspace between them. Without thinking, he accommodated Hannibal's proximity in the subtle angle of his head towards him, allowing him the space of his peripherals. Will sighed again, steadier this time: "I have groceries in the car."

"I'm sure you can collect them," Hannibal turned to face the comatose figure, and Will did the same, "He won't mind." That made Will want to hit him.

"When will the effects wear off?"

A glimmer of Hannibal's watch, "Soon to now. A higher dosage would have probably killed him. I'm surprised he's kept for this long."

"Hm." Gauze bandages and duct tape secured his forearms and ankles to the hardwood of the chair, far too tight to be remotely comfortable. The man's short fingernails had blood and grit underneath them, one of them was broken. There was either a fight, or he had tried to hold onto the ground, frantically scrabbling around for purchase.

Will took a breath, and forbid himself to imagine it.

He was about to ask another question but something shining caught his eye, draped across the bed, latex-like, taken on the form of a man. Scowling, he moved over to it and found himself smiling. It looked like a full body condom, or a transparent hazmat suit, and he picked up the sleeve to feel the heavy plastic on his palm. *Makes perfect sense*, he supposed, and thought that it would run the risk of looking spectacularly bad on anyone else. Hannibal with his three-piece suits, and face of naught but cheekbones, would pull it off unlike most: "Do you plan on making a mess?" The suit was alongside a black military-like case in which you'd expect to find a gun, "You seem prepared for it. And to prevent it."

"Luck favours the prepared, Will." That reminded Will of his school days and it made him want to transcend his body, down into Hell.

"Perhaps. Depends, Doctor-" Halfway through, a strained, soft groan cut both their attention away. Hannibal went over to check the man's pulse with two fingers pressed into the exposed line of his neck: "What do you have planned?"

"I plan on accommodating your inspirations. Even if you desire to kill him outright, I'd consider it a pleasure to have witnessed." In reply, he nodded, once, secretly pleased with his answer, "You need to unlearn your practiced restraint.

Will stood and stared as Hannibal shucked off his suit jacket and put it over Will's coat on the rack, quickly rolled up his sleeves, and- wholly unconcerned- took a chewed dog toy about the size of a fist from the floor and put it in the man's mouth. He secured it in place with a gag made of the same gauze bandage he'd used to strap him down with. When he pulled it taut, the man's cheeks were stretched back so harshly that it looked as if he was snarling; teeth bared like one of the crinkled skin mouths of the disembodied beasts lining the walls in Hannibal's home. Almost grinning.

As Hannibal tied a knot snug against the base of his skull, Will could picture the man's jawbone being cracked and ripped from his head. Hannibal doing so with just his hands. Flesh torn and oozing, those white, hooked teeth dug from gum to be scattered on the plastic flooring. The slippery, gurgling muscle of his tongue hanging loose and limp from his throat. He could imagine the noises it would make.

"He'll take a few minutes to fully come around. The awareness will accompany sensation, but he shouldn't be able to move very much," Hannibal explained, checking the eyes that were rolled back in his head, flicking around behind his closed eyelids, "I don't think he will be very happy when he wakes up."

"Would you be?" Will scoffed, stepping nearer to observe how his fingers twitched against the arms of the chair, similar to how the little beige moth's wings had done. He mainly spoke to himself when he said: "I think his fear will probably take over. An unknown space, two strange men, drugged- all the displacement that comes with that. Not to mention, he's bound and gagged." Will was relaxed going off his casual tone, unlike Hannibal had ever seen him, "I doubt he'll be able to *think*, at all."

"Fear entices. When a creature is frightened, it's usually bringing more attention to itself than it wishes; making it easier for the things it fears to seek it out."

"What did he do to warrant being sought out?" He'd liken the look Will gave him to a aloof animal begging for scraps, feral in his nature; so attune to his atavistic callings to fight and flee, and unpredictable in regard to which one he'd choose.

"Does there have to be a reason?"

"There's *always* a reason." Knowingly correct, he gave Hannibal a sidelong glance and a hint of a smirk. He found Will's ability to see straight through his evasive façade provoked as much anger as it did intrigue. But it certainly told him that he wouldn't be fleeing. Not yet.

"He's surprisingly used to these kind of scenarios. Albeit, from a different perspective." The man's eyes swam in their bid to open, "Different setting."

"How do you know?"

"When people discover you're a psychiatrist, they feel far more inclined to tell you things they would otherwise restrain. Far more so when they're drunk."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, this is merely an act of karma. He's no one to be missed." Spilling a drink on an expensive suit was enough to justify the action, but the confessions to human asportation made it that bit easier.

Will cocked his head a little, observing the man's slowly simmering consciousness with keen attention, and turned to collect a fishhook knife: "Rise and shine," With one swift movement and a crunch, the instrument was jammed into the man's kneecap. Hannibal marvelled. The man took to trying to cry out- finally awoken.

Blood erupted as a quickly creeping stain darkening the fabric of his jeans and running down his shin. He twisted and writhed against his restraints to no avail, his dark eyes wide and misted, his cries and shouts muffled by the gag- he was like a choked, baying cattle.

Past his noises, the dogs whimpered, too, snuffling under the door. Winston could be heard above the rest.

Will shushed the man's shouts, but he didn't listen, so he took hold of the knife again, leant in, and twisted. He could hear the grind of bone-on-bone and squelch of bleeding flesh, and another cry sounded again.

He only managed to stifle himself when Will seized his face, grip tight, "You're upsetting the dogs." He said, trying to quiet him and catching the man's struggle, holding him firm so he was forced to meet his eyes with his already distorted face reddening in his hand. Will imitated sympathy in the rise of his brow, gaze flat and cynical: "If you're quiet, I won't kill you." He offered, sincere. Hannibal smiled with his eyes.

"Are you wanting to torture him?" Hannibal asked, and Will huffed a breath, straightening and taking the knife with him, causing a soft, restrained sob. Hannibal's shared causality about the whole thing seemed to allow the man the realisation of how truly fucked he was. It was all over his face, "What do you want to do, Will?"

Will looked into his pleading, tearful eyes, listened to his muted begging and weeping, and considered it for a moment.

Then: "Cut off his hands."

Being used to modest, self-effacing designs that were counted amongst the works of others, Will found it heady to be making his own decisions. No veil of another's thoughts. But the recognisable theatrics of Hannibal's designs were somehow less gruesome to him once he'd

seen the surgical practice behind it, like pulling away the face of a clock and being in awe of it's intricacies. This hidden side to it- the instruments, the saline solution, the sight of blood- as if he was only performing a mandatory surgery.

Watching him strain to use the bone cutter to break the bones of the forearms was the only part that made him blink and look away. The sudden snapping sound it made was similar to hearing a strong branch crack in the night.

Hannibal readjusted one of the tourniquets once he'd tied off the last gathering of skin to seal the wound somewhat; cinched together like a present wrapping. The detached hands were laid palm up by the feet of the chair, cooling. Where the wrist had been severed was puffy and swelling, seeping fluids onto the plastic, a mangle of marbled pink meat and splintered white. It looked closer to a unmoving Halloween movie prop than a real amputated hand.

Disconcertingly enraptured, Will leant back against one of the armchairs and tracked a drop of sweat down the pale, fevered skin of the man's cheekbone, to his jugular, absorbing into the fabric of his clammy shirt now stuck to him. His breath was harsh and slow, his speech almost-- slurred, only able to groan feebly in a lull between wakefulness and sleep: "He's suffering a haemorrhage." Hannibal stated, nonchalant, snapping off his reddened, shining gloves to replace them, "It's unlikely he'll last much longer. If I am to align him to my work, I'll have to act now."

Organ removal. Done far before rigor mortis set in. Will knew this. He hummed approval, heart unsteadily beating with the empathy entwined in him unable to be completely snuffed out; still, he held his knife, blood drying in the cracks and creases of his own hand.

Routinely, Hannibal got out all the items he needed- including a box that looked to be a cooler- and set to work on easily scooping out a liver as Will's mind wandered off, listening to his dogs outside. Feeling the handle of the blade in his hand. The solidity of the ground beneath his feet. A needle was threaded, and he spoke, staring at a patch on the wooden floor: "I used to have a reoccurring nightmare about being attacked by a bear I was-- about *twelve*? I'd watched a documentary about a man who survived it, alone in the dark outside his family home, and imagined myself in his place."

"Why tell me this now?" Hannibal asked, after a moment, wiping down the sutures.

"The brutality of this reminded me of it." Will met his searching eyes, "You seem like an animal."

A pause. Hannibal's expression was tamed, and unknowable, "Bears don't harvest organs, Will." He thought it cruel, that dismissive stare.

"No." He agreed: "They eat them."

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Will found himself zoning out into the tiny traces of red and brown stains painted along the wood where the corpse once sat. Playing connect-the-dots with blood.

Welcome to (Weird) Afterglow After Murder, population: these two. Will has a bit of crisis afterwards, but he'll be great soon enough, don't even worry.

Chapter Notes

Mentions of sleep paralysis, by the way. I know how awful it is.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Despite the depraved stereotypes bred from slasher films, and not entirely lacking the want or means to do so, Will didn't get to watch the life drain from the man's eyes. It was actually pretty anticlimactic; considering all the engulfing pain and sadism he'd been subjected to he kind of just-- *fizzled out*, instead of the tragic, screaming, prayergasm that usually accompanied such a prolonged and brutal demise. The strain of his jaw went slack, face elongated and dull like a shadow. And that was it. Death has always been rather melodramatic. They both witnessed the disappointing end, and stood silently in the time preceding it.

The living were as loud as the slain.

Hannibal didn't respond verbally to Will's statement because he didn't need to. It was neither a question, nor entirely an accusation, so he left it be. He wouldn't deign to deny the implications anyway- what real difference would such a detail make? *Doesn't it take one to know one?* Perhaps that would be wishful thinking.

They first freed and moved the body, letting it fall off the chair with a hard thud, then rolling it up in plastic on the floor. Will let Hannibal take the knife he'd plunged into his knee, and did as he was told when it came to washing his hands. He suggested Will burn the chair when he returned to the room, turning cleaning up the rest of his supplies, and Will found himself zoning out into the tiny traces of red and brown stains painted along the wood where the corpse once sat. Playing connect-the-dots with blood.

If Hannibal was pleased, he had hardly told his face, spare his placid expression that could either have been contentment or concentration. Perhaps both, being a reflection of the nights

events, shimmering brightly on the surface of his deeper thoughts and feelings. Will found that he wanted to know them. But he did envy it- how Hannibal seemed to do everything with effortless strength and agility, remaining sterile and inhumanly efficient. He was so *present*. Always sharp and fully aware of himself- he didn't need a moment to calm down, or take it all in.

Who Hannibal was *never* changed. Not even when steeped in violence and covered in blood. He was consistent in his demeanour and countenance in phatic small talk, and whilst dining or drinking, as he was in the infliction and facilitation of torture and death. Between those, Will had always had to shift. Converge and realign afterwards, scrape up whatever remained of himself.

It hadn't been allowed to be this *easy* before. He hadn't allowed it to be. But he didn't want to go back now he had.

The dogs swarmed Will with the flies when he reopened the door, but he didn't struggle in wrangling them back outside with a stern tone of voice. He grumbled at them when they got under his feet as he helped carry the body out to Hannibal's car. The scent of damp earth and the tufted evening primroses fragranced the cleaner night air. Once they'd folded the man into the trunk of the Bentley like a damaged bag of offal, they stood over their shared work, framed by the black of the car and lit up lazily by the pallid, humid glow of the porch light. Motionless and quiet, as if they had witnessed a glorious thing. A genesis.

"Well," Will broke the silence, huffing a breath, "I'll say this for him: he had a lot of guts." He said, gesturing vaguely to the line of neat stitches running the length of the man's abdomen.

Hannibal would've rolled his eyes and sighed, if he were a lesser man: "It would be an awful shame if something happened to that pretty face of yours, Will."

A scoff: "Are you going to display him?" That piqued Hannibal's interest. He moved to cover the face in the plastic wrapping, considering the body before him, then Will.

"Possibly. Would you like me to?"

Will shrugged slightly, stuffing his hands into his pockets, "I can see why it appeals to you to do so."

"Why is that?" Hannibal regarded him curiously. Will could only look down at the blurred face and think that it looked exactly like the faces he sees in his dreams- hazy, emotionless. Something off about those eyes. Strange to think that he was ever once alive, looking at him: "Does it appeal to you?"

"Maybe. I can see the-- *artistry*, to displaying them. It transforms them into the sublime. An elevation of that which anyone would find ugly."

"*Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good*. Morbidities can be oddly attractive. It's no wonder people often rip flowers from the ground to harvest, and are slow to dispose of them, even as they wither and die."

"Or people are just lazy." Will muttered, his thoughts unappreciatively straying to think of humanity's collective weakness when it came to refusing impermanence. Whether it be ex-lover's clothing stolen, or ashes in urns sat forever on a mantelpiece. He wasn't guiltless- he kept the collars of any dogs who died in his care, always had.

"Possibly." Hannibal conceded, tucking the case of medical equipment and cooler beside the man's legs, and Will turned away to watch one of the dogs rolling around in the grass as he reached up and slammed the trunk shut: "We are reluctant to admit the true beauty of something if it reflects poorly on our morality."

"Death can be beautiful. I have no qualms in admitting it." Will shrugged again, exhaling, and looking back to Hannibal. His skin glowed in the light, soft and pretty; two words that felt weird to put to such a man, given everything he'd done- *they'd* just done.

"How do you feel?"

A question he'd not heard in so long, he'd forgotten how to answer it. His eyes trailed away, as if following dust, "Better. I think. I'm not-- as lost as I was."

"Good." Hannibal said, a smile promised in his eyes, "The enlightenment of new experiences renews a vitality that we can forget we own. I'm glad to be able to aid you with that." *God*, Will hadn't been addressed so honestly and sincerely before, he could've been blindsided. He could lose himself in it.

Hesitating only slightly, Hannibal had his hand on the car door handle when Will asked: "Will I see you again after this?" He smiled properly then, terribly fond.

"As much, or as little as you like, Will." The gentle nod he was given in reply, a blush to the tips of Will's ears, gave him pause, until he caught himself and disappeared into the car. When the engine thrilled to life, Will waved him off with a curt raise of his hand, unsure to whether he was seen or not.

The car, and their shared crime, bled into the rest of the night in front of his very eyes, and Will stood still for quite a while until Winston sniffed at his leg. His dogs guided him back inside.

That night, Will's sleep was plagued. In the more pleasant dreams, he only had fragmented, blurry half-conversations with Hannibal (or-- what he thought was Hannibal) about mother nature and her cruelty. The visions were yellow and white, like an naked lightbulb, or watching it through a sunlit lens, and Hannibal's voice was rumbling all around him.

But in the worst, he felt and watched a meat hook being pushed through the tender, nerve-riddled flesh of his ankle. The thick metal scraped the end of the bone in his foot, and he thought it impossible to survive the all-encompassing pain it provided. Searing hot, and lighting up his nerve endings to swap between feeling and numbness. For a frightened moment, he didn't know if he'd wake back up. He couldn't move, and slipped in and out of awake paralysis as he was lugged up and left dangling, his eyes resisting to open fully and roll forward, blinking and breathing furiously, seeing a figure looming by his window.

What he assumed was blood came down his leg, but he could only feel it as heat.

The noises and sparkling, intensity of it, that *pain*, waved over him, and left him a tangled, sweating mess in disarray when he finally managed to get out of it. Gasping for air as he woke up, he found himself entirely intact. And alone.

Such deep, vivid sensation wasn't out of place in his nightmares, but he didn't know he could feel agony like that, and have it utterly eradicated as soon as he awoke. It was a vile trick for his mind to make.

He couldn't stay still for the rest of the day; afraid that something unseen would cut into him, and he'd be abandoned again.

Chapter End Notes

PRO TIP: if you get sleep paralysis that's ridiculously bad like mine, it might seem like the wrong thing to do, but close your eyes and go back to sleep no matter what. That way, you can wake yourself back up.

Thank you for all the comments and kudos! I simultaneously grin and cry at every one of them.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

He was lying. But he wasn't about to strip down in this man's kitchen, of all people.

Will visits Hannibal with a surprise, so Hannibal returns the surprise. Very fluff-forward but with heavy, insidious undertones.

Hannibal was freshly out of his morning shower, adorned in a crimson silk robe and loose slacks, when he heard a rattling knock at the door. He stared into cooled, open space as he stilled for a brief moment, running through if any plans had slipped his mind, whether or not he recognised the knocking pattern. It was around six am, too early for visitors, and he hadn't yet had breakfast. There were no scheduled deliveries, and he thought as much as he descended the stairs.

Upon opening the door, a familiar scent of cheap cologne and dog almost knocked him backwards, "Good morning, Doctor Lecter," The sun had hardly risen yet, but there was Will, smiling, unusually chirpy. Practically bouncing on the balls of his feet. Hannibal returned the smile.

"I suppose it is." For once, the pleasure to see him outweighed his curiosity as to why he was. Overcast and cold, the biting wind greeted him unwelcomely, and Will seemed to be feeling it just the same: "Would you like to come in?"

"Oh, no." He would've waved a hand if they weren't in his pockets, "I have, erm-- some roadkill in the back. Do you want it?"

Hannibal appeared surprised- once again, standing in a doorway half-dressed with Will as the culprit- and an acute look of intrigue settled on his face. His slight smile didn't leave him, and Will gestured for him to follow. Stepping into some suede loafers, Hannibal obliged.

Will's car was parked on the corner of the street, nearing a derelict-looking alleyway foregrounding the old birch tree framing the left side of his house. When Will clicked the trunk open, he was still grinning suspiciously, and Hannibal's brow furrowed only a little when he rounded the car to sidle up next to him. Looking from Will, he found the roadkill folded up like a piece of origami and nested in bin bags: a pale woman of her late-twenties, gutted.

Without comment and no indication of the true exasperation he felt, Hannibal paused, then shut the trunk and moved to return to the house. Will's smile broke into a breathy, impudent

laugh, going after him as he stormed off: "Does it count as roadkill if something dies in someone's driveway? Figured you'd know."

"I hardly have experience in the matter." Was Hannibal's only reaction, his posture unchanged and therefore not as mad as he sounded. Will could only try to harbour his amusement, following Hannibal up the stairs and back inside his house even though no attempt was made to actually let him in. The door closed behind him.

"Ah. Well, I'd recommend it. Acting on impulse really gets the blood pumping." Will said, hanging up his coat and itching his forearm. Looking up at the stuffed head of a wild boar hanging in the foyer, he remembered the face of the man they killed together, "What are you doing up this early, anyway? It's a Sunday."

"Does that mean you were planning on waking me?" Hannibal accused, entering the kitchen and setting up the machine to make fresh-ground coffee. Despite his disapproving attitude, he took two China mugs from one of the overhead cupboards.

"I wasn't *planning*. I was hoping." In reply, Hannibal hummed, corner of his mouth giving away his real lack of upset.

"I suppose your plan won't be entirely fruitless, as you can stay for breakfast, if you like." It wasn't an offer he'd want to refuse.

"Thank you."

The coffee pouring, and electrifying the air with its pungent aroma, Will touched his arm again, absently, and Hannibal noticed, "You're bleeding." He moved his head, inhaling, and suddenly he was right next to Will, like a dog sniffing out a scent.

"I mean, yeah. But it's--" Instead of properly answering, Will had to cut himself off to be able to swallow the lump that welled up in his throat. Hannibal was pulling up his sleeve for him and untying his makeshift bandage covering, and even the slight contact of his hands and fingers was overwhelming. *So unused to touch.*

The injury was a set of three scratches, relatively deep, and obvious that it had been caused by a human clawing at him. Due to the angle, the fight seemed to be from Will attacking from behind. A defensive wound from the defenceless. If he breathed deep enough, he could sense chloroform on Will's palms. He considered that it probably smelt better than his cologne.

Hannibal took him by the hand and led him over to the sink to wash his wrist under cold water to stop the swelling. Will was struck by how gentle he was being, "Are you hurt elsewhere?"

"No."

He was reprimanded in a glare, "I don't appreciate lying, Will." Will breathed a sigh through his nose. He *was* lying. But he wasn't about to strip down in this man's kitchen, of all people.

On one hand, he knew Hannibal was a doctor, but there was something else about him too. Those obnoxious, revisited suggestions planted in his brain that hadn't been confirmed or denied. Questions about pigs and people. That deceptively fond look in his eyes. How easily he'd invaded his dreams.

"I'll live," He assured, clenching his teeth as Hannibal carefully wrapped his forearm in cloth bandages he'd collected from under the sink. A baffling contrast to watching him with those blood-soaked gloves on, like a weird recreation of Macbeth.

"You won't if you're neglectful to watch for signs of infection."

"...Noted." Politely, Will perched himself in the corner chair, and watched Hannibal prepare a breakfast of poached eggs with spinach, chilli butter, and rose harissa. Halfway through, he was summoned to keep an eye on the eggs as Hannibal saw to the herbs. The sinewy, glossy whites of the eggs looked like eyeballs scooped from their sockets.

Using the bin bags- and a good slice of luck that no one was around to see them doing so- they managed to get the body inside. Neither of them thought much of the fact they'd only just eaten, and were now handling a corpse.

When Hannibal asked why Will had bought it to him, he shrugged, and said he figured he'd make the best use of it.

His presumption rang true when Hannibal appeared at his house a few days later, at night, like some skeletal, nocturnal creature emerging from the forest. When Will opened the door, some of the dogs ran out to welcome him, and Buster tried to jump up to grab the paper bag from his hand: "What are you doing here?"

"The moment you exchange spontaneity with rules you've lost the edge of romance," Hannibal quoted, half-smiling. He seemed-- warmer in demeanour than usual; Will brushed it off in thinking that he'd just had a nice day. God forbid he was *liked* enough to be visited.

"Romance? Aren't you getting a bit old for romance, Doctor?"

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that, Will." Hannibal countered, holding out the brown wrapping in his hand, and bottle of wine in the other, "I come bearing gifts. Can I come in?"

Will smiled, whistling for the dogs to return, and holding the door open, "By all means." Winston only yipped once when he did so, still refusing to fully let his guard down. Neither Hannibal nor Will could entirely blame him for it. Will could relate to it, too much.

Sighing, he let Hannibal hang up his coat and step out of his shoes, quickly going back to the kitchen. Hannibal followed him eagerly, and stopped in the doorway, raising a brow, "They like their liver mixed with flax seeds." Will explained, stirring a mixing bowl, the smell of fresh steak and honey sweet in the air: "Sometimes gizzard. I know, crazy week here. Call the fire Marshall and get this guy shut down, right?"

"They would certainly agree with you." A gesture was given to the begging dogs around him licking their lips, the smaller ones aggressively sniffing the floor and trying to balance on

their hind legs to gain height. You'd mistake them as being starved: "You can probably incorporate some of this, too," Hannibal put the package down, and opened the paper away from the mess Will had made, revealing a hearty brick sized piece of meat, not even filleted yet. Still on the bone.

"Is it wise to ask the source?"

"That depends if you really want the truth." They exchanged a look which unsettled Will's core a little.

Something in him, innate and utilitarian, jumped to a conclusion he'd rightly made previously, and sent out a loud message to warn him *not* to accept this, under *any* circumstance. To not soil his moral code with it. That this was *wrong*.

But, when met with those crimson eyes, it wavered, like a smoke signal.

"Is it human-grade?" He asked, looking away and grounding something, not properly reaching Hannibal's eye line anymore.

Hannibal was somewhat amused, "Yes, it's perfectly suitable to have as a meal ourselves. I presume that's what you prefer to use in their food."

Will hummed an agreement, scowling in confusion, "You want to cook for me? You drove for that long, to come all the way over here, because you wanted to cook for me?"

"Yes. You don't do it enough for yourself." It seemed unreasonable, irrational, and quite a lot like a lie. In retrospect, it was more likely that Will was being too hard on himself. Disbelieving of anyone's sincerity. Anyone's kindness, spare his own.

After all, emotions are like art. They can be taken, forged, and appear identical to the real thing.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

The next day, completely unexpectedly, a package arrived at his door. For a small moment, he feared it would be a similar sick joke he played, of organs, or a hand annulled from an arm, curled up like a dead spider.

A date! Hooray! They're going on a date! (To the Verger Estate. I wonder what could possibly happen.)

Chapter Notes

Inspired by a scene in *Altered Carbon*.

Using all, if not most, of the raw ingredients he could salvage in Will's kitchen, Hannibal made sautéed cutlets with prosciutto, sage, and lemon, and some fresh asparagus he found forgotten in the bottom drawer of Will's fridge. Rather upsettingly, it was the best meal Will had enjoyed in his own home for-- he doesn't know how many months. They ate in a comfortable and grateful silence, the radio humming a staticky tune from its place beside the sink.

Hannibal's eyes only wandered as far as Will's hand on his knife. But Will let himself admire the luminescence from the lamp casting pools of light across Hannibal's hard cheekbones and deep eye sockets. How dark his eyes were downcast, narrow, and a lavish red, the same shade as the wine they were drinking, like the flesh of an overripe cherry.

The dogs were gifted any leftovers of the anonymous meat, chopped up and cooked briskly, as an after-dinner treat. Keenly, they licked and mouthed at Will's hands when he offered them out to be checked. Feeling Hannibal's disgust at it, he washed his hands using dish-soap when he put the plates in the sink. His back was turned as he heard: "I have a proposal for you, Will," And he was glad for it, or Hannibal probably would've seen him roll his eyes.

"I knew you'd have a real reason for coming all the way out here." He sighed, grabbing a cloth, "As long as you don't get down on one knee." Hannibal almost chuckled at that.

"You *can* reject such things." Hannibal consoled, holding his wine glass delicately between two fingers, "Agreeing to something unwanted will only reduce the progress we've made, in regard to your... wellbeing."

Will didn't particularly like him addressing the elephant in the room that was his depression, even if it was indirect. It felt like naming an unwanted pet that you'd get too attached to, like an intangible, unknowable inhabitant that he only knew from the dangerous energy it left in the room, similar to the brewing of a storm. A murky, throttling storm. The word always seemed ill-fitting to the true nature of the disease, and is used to describe a divot in the ground, or the economic status decline, not something so debilitating and painfully elusive, that it kills people.

At least serial killers lacked obscurity. Their victims are put in the papers between an advert and a headline, and are mourned more than most, from the notoriety and tragedy gained from how painful their deaths must have been. The thing responsible is punished, and denounced as a monster. The victims are pitied. Not the other way around.

Suicides are never as well-received, and often remain unvoiced, something to be looked upon with shame and falsified empathy. There's no true understanding unless familiar with that word, that vulgarity. Knowledgeable of what it is to look into a noose, like a necklace. Will felt ugly and scorned just thinking about it.

"What am I agreeing to, then?"

"An opportunity. There is an artistic gathering that I've been invited to during the week." Hannibal's expression gave away what he was about to say before he said it, "There are some-- unfavourable guests, at this event. I thought we could attend it together."

Will couldn't help the wry smile that broke his guise, "Are you experienced with public executions?"

"It wouldn't be public, unless you want us both to be caught." He had thought about it, at night, between his dreams. Hannibal sipped his wine, leaning against the edge of the dining table. The light playing in his eyes almost made him appear gleeful at the prospect. Will folded his arms across his chest.

"I don't have any suits appropriate enough."

"That can be rectified." Will couldn't decide how he'd feel with someone of Hannibal's taste and status picking out clothes for him, and taking him out to a fancy, bourgeois occasion.

Either, he'd feel like a snake in the grass, or a puppet. Both of which weren't exactly ideal.

"Would I get a say in that?"

"If it would make you more comfortable." Who in their right mind is that accommodating to someone they're neither obliged to as a doctor, or a lover? It was worrying that these niceties and interest wouldn't last, or would turn out to be an elaborate ruse... Unless he's in lo-- "Are you in agreement?"

Will's eyes snapped back to his, and he quickly preoccupied himself with scratching behind Winston's ear, "Okay, sure. But I'm not wearing a tie."

Thankfully, Will didn't have to get a suit with all the finesse and peacock colours of Hannibal's. It was a personal tailor- *of course it was*- who greeted Hannibal smoothly in Italian when he entered the shop. Perfumed air swam out to meet Will, clogging up his nose and constricting throat more than it already was, body tightened like a screw, with anxiety.

Swatches of materials lined the walls, in shades of identical-looking midnight blues, emerald and forest greens, and burgundy colours that could've been mistaken for blood evidence. Illustrations of measurements, outlines of suit sections, a collection of patterned and paisley ties, a big silk curtain leading to a fitting and display room. It was impressively packed for such a small establishment.

Not trusting himself to stray, and fearful of breaking something worth more than his life, Will just lingered behind Hannibal as he spoke Italian. They occasionally gestured and looked to him, like he was a spectacle.

He figured he hadn't been to get a suit fitted since his cousin got married, when he was in his early twenties, and even then the suits were only rented. The essential prim-and-proper attire anyone should keep for formal events didn't hold a place in Will's wardrobe; he'd stopped going to funerals years ago, and adult parties long before that.

It wasn't as much of a fuss as he thought it would be, all he had to do was stand there in slightly oversized tuxedo, being clipped, and posed, and measured. Hannibal sat off to one side, his hand up to his mouth, studious and silent. Ignoring his presence helped the most.

Will refused to look at the bill, and Hannibal didn't say anything about it. He was frustrated that he couldn't understand Italian, for how much they spoke, and the woman laughed.

The next day, completely unexpectedly, a package arrived at his door. For a small moment, he feared it would be a similar sick joke he played, of organs, or a hand annulled from an arm, curled up like a dead spider.

He hadn't dared to try it on again, or dog hair would've instantaneously stuck to it, the same as every other item of clothing he owned. Instead, he turned up at Hannibal's house early that night, and used his guest room to change after dinner. He slicked back his hair, and left the bowtie undone around his neck: "I think I deserve an explanation as to why I'm dressed as a butler." He said curtly, descending the stairs, and fiddling with the suspender on his shoulder. Hannibal smiled strangely, watching him move.

"Will you resent me if I tell you that your supposed to look like a butler?" Wordlessly, he moved over to him, and Hannibal fixed his bowtie, "I wasn't extended the kindness of bringing a plus one, so this the solution."

"I'll be your *servant*?"

"No. You'll be a staff member. As long as you offer champagne enough, no one will notice your disguise."

The easy confidence that came with having a semblance of self esteem had slipped Will's mind over the years. He felt good about himself. He looked divine, and Hannibal told him as

much, when they pulled up to the venue, and Will fidgeted.

Before Will knew it, he had a tray of canapés balanced in his hand, and filed in amongst Baltimore's social elite without question. The room was opulent, brightly lit by a chandelier, and was all creams, golds, and whites. A complete opposite to the cavernous, macabre interior of Hannibal's house. Classical music shrilled in the backdrop to eloquently told stories and giggling, cultivated gossip of uninteresting topics, opinions told by people too snobbish to be aware of true politics. All well-versed and knowingly *better*, that they seemed impervious to any suffering. Even to death. Unaware of what lurked among them, unspoken, taboo, in the form of men. Still, they remained fragile.

They were the kind of people to be told the secret to immortality. And be rich enough to afford it, too.

He spotted Hannibal and his cheekbones, in his imperial red and black suit, smiling politely at a joke. With a few pauses for greedy fingers, he made it over to him as he excused himself from conversation: "This a fucking joke," Will muttered behind him, without change to his still expression, close and loud enough for only Hannibal to hear. He sidled up against the centre table, trying not to knock anything over, "Tell me why we're here, preferably before I break a glass into your hand."

"For whom, don't you mean?" Hannibal corrected, turning slightly and taking from Will's tray. Will only glowered for a second, "I predict he'll approach me soon enough. His sister is a patient of mine."

"Does this sister know about your plans?" Will asked, offering a kind smile to a tipsy woman who took the rest of the food from his tray. He placed it on an empty chair adjacent, and collected a tray of champagne glasses from the table.

"Most definitely. She's the one who invited me." Hannibal finished his drink and placed it on Will's tray, and walked off to a group of people, opening up to him like a flower to the sun. Will watched him go, and huffed a sigh.

After a long twenty minutes of standing around, serving, and keeping an eye on Hannibal's social niceties, Will felt that he had enough irritation bottled up that he could probably kill at least half the people in the room. Use a silver tray snapped in half to create an edge, or his own bowtie to strangle. When he was too busy imagining said mass murder, he heard: "Doctor Lecter!" and turned his head to see a wild-eyed, haphazard young man with glasses, shaking Hannibal's hand enthusiastically. He had fox fur around his neck, wore a beige suit, and scarlet tie. Will thought he recognised him from somewhere.

"Very nice to finally meet you, Mason."

"Isn't it just! I've heard so much about you, Doctor, I feel as if I *know* you." Mason chuckled obnoxiously, not letting go of Hannibal's hand, and leaning into him a little in an overly friendly gesture.

"And I, you." Hannibal smiled, properly, but with some kind of tempered darkness thrilling in his eyes. It was a threat, Will could see it. Mason probably caught it, but only kept smiling,

retracting his clammy hand to pick up another glass.

Will went across the room, and intermittently observed from a distance. His head snapped back to look when he saw Hannibal jolt, gripping Mason's upper arm as if to steady him. He couldn't hear the oddly polite argument, both concerned with appearances, but Hannibal's demeanour had shifted to be a subtle hostility- the same as a change in winds.

He watched Mason brush roughly past Hannibal, and make towards the stairs. Exchanging a brief look with him, they shared a thought, and Will moved. Mason almost bumped straight into him, and he extended his arm: "Champagne, Monsieur?" He took one, and left.

Eventually, Hannibal followed after him, which looked like a stalk to a trained eye. Will gave it a handful of seconds, and did the same. He caught up with him down a darkened hallway, away from the glee of the crowds, "What happened?"

"I told him he shouldn't embarrass himself. He said I was making his behaviour a problem." Was the extent of Will's understanding, until Hannibal stopped, waited, and barged through a bedroom door to their left.

"You again!" Mason was thrown up against the wall before Will knew he was in the room, "Hey! *Carlos!*"

"I don't think that's any use now, Mason."

Hannibal tightened his grip on Mason's collar and he wheezed a laugh, "You lay a hand on me, and my father will kill you." Will sighed again, and slammed the door shut: "You, and your French friend." He laughed, tight and high like a trapped piglet.

"Hey, I'm not French, and I never laid a hand on you." Will snapped, taking off his bowtie and wrapping it around the knuckles of his right hand. Hannibal turned to him, and, unannounced, shoved a stumbling, giggling Mason over to him. Grabbing him, he pushed him up against the wall and swung hard at his jaw, cracking it loud. He pulled him close, grumbling: "*Now* I laid a hand on you."

"No offence intended, but am I supposed to know you?" How he kept fucking laughing really didn't help his prospects, being caged in a room with two killers.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

"What does anxiety smell like?"

"Tepid. Rather... acrid. Like the humid air after a sleep filled with terror."

Do I sense... a kiss?

Chapter Notes

Listen, I know it's been approximately 84 years, and I have plenty of excuses but I'm so sorry for not updating. I didn't plan out this fic at all really. My bad. I'll try to get better. Thank you all so much for sticking around and reading my other stuff though! Hopefully their first kiss makes up for it. More romance to come.

Will stood at his kitchen counter, the light outside a pale blue with the first trickles of sunrise, and looked at his reflection in the window. He found himself refracted, pieces of something now lost. There was a change in him. He sighed, looking back down at his bruised and bleeding knuckles, blood fogging up the warm water a bright shade of red. His hands were still shaking.

Mason Verger, sole heir to the Verger Meatpacking Industry, was sat comatose in his front room.

He'd shoved the dogs outside in fear of upsetting them- Winston's hackles had come up instantly, bristling and electric, the rest of them in a similar state. If he strained his ears, he could hear them worrying at the door. Hannibal was doing-- something, and he'd left him for a moment, trying to remedy the uncertainty he felt. When he killed, sometimes, he'd be so unstable and so detached from himself, that he'd vomit. That fear and that nausea wasn't present anymore, or at least only remained as embers. And that was equally terrifying.

A young man, with handgun drawn, had attempted to stop them once Mason had been punched. He appeared from nowhere, dressed in black as hired security often are, and his fingers held a tremor around the trigger: *"Hey! Leave him alone or I shoot!"*

"Do you know how to use that?" The man shot- a surprise even to himself- aim only a foot from Hannibal's head, the bullet lodging in the plaster of the wall.

"Yes, he knows how to use it." Will huffed, readjusting his grip on Mason's throat with a grumble as Hannibal knocked the man to the floor. When he squirmed to pick up his gun, Hannibal reached down and grabbed the man's foot with two hands, standing on his knee. Before he could realise what was being done to him, Hannibal yanked upwards, and the bone in his shin audible cracked. He cried out, only to fall silently into crying.

"Oh, please don't shoot anyone." Mason sighed when Hannibal took up the weapon, sounding upset.

"Feeling moral, Mason?"

"For the sake of the carpet! It's newly fitted," He drawled, feigning sadness, "I don't particularly want the interior redecorated with my brain matter, I'm sorry to say."

"You really aren't in the position to make demands. No apology necessary." Hannibal said, turning the pistol over in his gloved hands, the man sobbing and mewling at his feet. He cocked the gun and pointed it down at him just to watch his face, and gauge Mason's reactions- to see if he'd show any empathy Margot had claimed he failed to bestow. Minutely, he proved her right. Only the young man begged.

"Don't! *Don't!*"

Hannibal tilted his head, "You should ask nicely." The bone of his leg was probably sticking out of his flesh because Will could smell the blood. A potentially lethal injury. Still, Hannibal pressed down on it with the heel of his shoe until he began screaming, please! please, don't! and writhing, pinned like a swallowtail. Then, Hannibal simply unloaded the gun with a soft click. Will watched the wasted bullets bounce off the man's chest, instead of plunging into it. Something of a potent metaphor.

Taking the opportunity of their shared distraction, Mason slipped from Will's grip, and before he could react, Mason landed a blow straight to his jaw that almost knocked him to the ground, cutting his lip open.

Will just straightened up and met his eyes again, tasting blood: "You really shouldn't have done that." Hannibal moved. Mason saw black.

Being pistol-whipped around the head knocked him out long enough to get out the back way, and bundle him into the car. He woke up pretty quickly, so they opened the trunk, and Hannibal injected something straight into his neck. He hadn't stirred since.

Will wondered if the man they'd left there with his splintered leg bone had since died. He took his hands from the water to wrap them, not flinching when Hannibal appeared from the darkness, and started bandaging his knuckles for him: "You mustn't allow yourself to become anxious, Will. I can smell it on you."

"What does anxiety smell like?"

"Tepid. Rather... *acrid*. Like the humid air after a sleep filled with terror."

"Have you recognised the scent on yourself?" Will watched his unchanging face, downcast eyes. The movement of his eyelids, pale lashes against his skin.

"Yes, I have. But not for many years."

"Are you coaxing me to change, how you have?" Their eyes met then, his hand stilling on the bandage. Will's curious expression didn't wane.

He didn't anticipate the kiss before it happened. Or maybe he did. He didn't expect to sink into it, lose himself entirely, utterly, only for a bubble-skin of time. Forget every thought but that of the plush warmth of Hannibal's red mouth. And it was gone, and they looked at each other with the heat of a fire, breath hot on their faces.

He wanted to stay there, stagnated in that single moment for long enough to figure it out. But Hannibal lowered his gaze, finishing wrapping up his second hand, and moved away with a motion to join him. The warmth of where his hands had held Will's felt awfully cold, then. Like a doused flame.

They stood side-by-side in front of Mason, slumped back in the chair with his head lulling. His form was limned by the moon, his glasses broken, the light hiding in the cracks. An IV bag shimmered above him, tube slinking down to a needle in his neck: "Has the pack been fed today?"

He found it odd to speak, his words stumbling back to his tainted lips, wondering if he'd imagined what happened previously, "Not since this morning."

"Are you entirely opposed to allowing your dogs to eat him, Will?"

Will frowned, "Entirely? No. But it's not preferable."

"Would they, if you asked them to?"

"Would you?" From what Will could see of his face, he seemed amused. A piece of rope was placed over the arm of the chair, "Won't you have to tie him down, as you did the last one?"

"No. He should remain paralytic when he wakes up."

On the ride back, Will had asked Hannibal how Mason's own kin, his own sibling, had allowed her bidding to be implemented so ruthlessly by a hand other than her own. Apparently, Margot had planned to do it herself, but after Hannibal's implicit suggestions otherwise, she gave him her blessing, so to speak. It was originally only as a lenient extension of revenge, but once she'd got pregnant with another's child, securing an heir, the plan became murder.

Hannibal told him of the cruel and vile things Mason had done to this younger sister. What he'd done, too, to those younger still.

His voice sounded deeper when he said: "I want it to hurt him."

Hannibal checked Mason's steady pulse at his wrist, a smile tinting his face, "I never said that he couldn't feel pain." Casually, Hannibal pushed the chair back to the wall, and took up the rope. He deftly threw it up to loop around one of the disused hooks on the top corner of the window, where a curtain pole would be. He reached up to fasten it, and Will watched the muscles of his back shift under his shirt as he did.

He couldn't help but stare with rapt attention when Hannibal simply tied a noose, and placed it around Mason's neck, pulling it taught so the skin of his throat was tugged upwards. If Will didn't know the context, it could've been the start of erotic asphyxiation. He loosened the top button of his shirt.

A chesty cough, and Mason's eyes rolled forward, blinking and blurred as if drunk. He was able to twitch his fingers, but that was the extent of his movement, "Doctor Lecter," He slurred, seemingly tickled instead of choleric, "I don't mean to alarm you, but I can't feel my legs." He laughed, manically, possessed.

"Well, Mason. I don't believe you'll be feeling anything for much longer. But I expect the wait to be unbearable."

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Dazed and confused, he came back to himself again, slowly, like a blizzard had calmed in his mind but he had to trudge through the heavy snow.

Panic attacks! Kissing! And jacking off after crying! Wow, this is so sad, Alexa play The Sound of Silence.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is very sad in order to lead to good things, with lowkey porn but highkey erotica, how fun. Enjoy yourself.

Grains of salt fell rapidly into fresh wounds, and they went red when they touched blood. Mason choked on his screams. After letting him burn with an unholy amount of pain, Will threw water over the same wounds he'd made, and he'd quieten down again. A few times, namely after the lower half of his face had been ever-so-gently peeled away from his skull, Mason had lost consciousness, as a last resort to rid himself of the agony. Only, it didn't work, because Hannibal responded in kind with something akin to an adrenaline shot, and he'd jerk back awake, back into hell. Mason laughed far more than anyone else would. Almost as if he was enjoying it.

"I fear that his heart won't take much more of this." Hannibal told him, using a bloody gloved hand to tighten the noose around Mason's neck when he made a noise that seemed to be a chortle, reducing his airflow to let his lipless mouth gasp like a speared fish taken from water. Will was glad he couldn't see the reds of Mason's exposed flesh and bone, dripping down his front, sticking to the air.

"You said he drinks children tears, right? Was that a figure of speech?"

"He makes margaritas using the tears of those he wrongs."

Will minutely quirked a brow, a placid look of decisiveness overtaking his expression; easily mistaken for ire, or wonderment: "That's very-- *Hitchcockian*." He paused, looking at the

glinting knife tucked into Hannibal's palm, "How fitting it would be if we did the same to him."

"What are you asking, Will?"

"I don't want to drink his tears. He doesn't deserve to shed them." Hannibal seemed to catch on then, loosening the knot of the noose and letting Mason spit out the blood and saliva foaming in his mouth. With a gentle hand, he removed Mason's broken glasses, and folded them up.

"Have you decided then? What you would like to take from him?"

"I cannot be placated by paltry excuses of reparation. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; this I demand from all who have wronged me." Will quoted, hearing Mason try to speak, looking up to meet Hannibal's inquisitive gaze, "Can you do it in the dark?"

"For you, of course." Will liked his mind being read. He averted his eyes and blinked, something making his chest tighten. At first, he thought it his adrenaline fizzing up, thinking of the kiss and the killing in parallel.

Hannibal went off and collected a knife the size of one used to cut cheese, thin and sharp like a letter opener, and pulled Mason's head back by his hair.

Will, blood warming his fingers through the plastic gloves, stepped back from himself as Hannibal pressed the knife into the delicate skin around Mason's eye socket. He watched it happen, through a looking glass, or a stained window, as if he was drifting off, losing touch. His lungs felt heavy, and it was suddenly too hard to breathe- lightheadedness made his ears ring, and the deafening, strained screams were drowned out by his own pulse muffling his ears.

A flood of heat washed over him, flighty and prickly. He took off his dirty gloves in a hurry. And as Mason's eyeball was taken bleeding from his head, masked by shadow, Will mumbled some half-formed excuse and fumbled to the door through the darkness, and outside into the night.

The door closed behind him, the cool air hit him in the face. His dogs greeted him, all trying to own his attention, ears softly back, big puppy eyes, tails wagging. They licked at his hands. He unsteadily sat himself down on the steps, deep breaths, blood pressure slowly apologising to him. Dazed and confused, he came back to himself again, slowly, like a blizzard had calmed in his mind but he had to trudge through the heavy snow.

Looking at Hannibal's car, the ground it sat on, it's sheen in the hesitant daylight like an oil slick, he thought of that fateful night they met. The ride, the body, the food. He remembered feeling underwhelmed and angry, then slightly scared. Thrilled.

Being sated with wine, leaning into Hannibal's hand when he was guided out of the door; finding him again in his dreams, and every night since.

Admittedly, he'd known something would happen between them within the first few hours of being in Hannibal's presence. It was held between them, as the knife was.

He remembered killing the woman on his driveway, how she'd clawed hard enough to break skin. He remembered laughing at Hannibal when he showed her to him, folded up like an origami piece in the trunk- the paradoxical look on his face of immense pride, yet distaste, unused to being deceived.

He remembered wanting to go and kiss him when he waited outside his office. Again, as he tended to the scratches on his arm. And again, when he tied his bowtie for him, but then it happened so abruptly, catching him off guard, that his brain couldn't quite keep up.

Winston pushed his head between Will's knees, looking worrisome. Sighing, Will stroked the soft fur of the dog's forehead with his thumb, and felt anxious heat peel off of him by the second.

After a moment, he could hear an angry tone with lisp from Mason's face stripped of lips, exposed teeth, and Hannibal said something back, voice deep and calm and collected. Then, there was more screaming, loud begging, then a crack and the screaming stopped.

Minutes felt longer than they were, but then the door clicked open, closed, and Hannibal wordlessly came down to sit right up next to him. Winston moved off to the side, sniffing at the grass but with his eyes looking up them. Will followed his wary gaze to Hannibal's hands, his sleeves rolled up, no blood in sight. He could smell him: sandalwood cologne, warm skin, champagne.

Even with the birds beginning to wake up, and the sky changing in preparation for morning, and the dogs racing about or chewing sticks, Will's senses snapped to him. Always responsive. Like he could be doing anything, anytime, and no matter what, his attention would rush to him like a tide to the daytime moon, whether he was there or not.

A mutual occurrence, truth be told.

"How are you feeling?"

Will looked back to the dogs, and the rustling trees. He leant into Hannibal's side a little and hoped it wasn't detectable, "Like I didn't mean to spoil anything."

"Nothing is spoiled. As long as you're here with me." Hannibal said, unconvinced he was entirely present, "You haven't disassociated to that degree before."

"I have, I-- *do*."

"Is it a cause of the violence becoming too arresting?"

Will scoffed, "No, it wasn't you, or the blood. I was just got overwhelmed, and it surfaced as... *panic*." He didn't like the feeling it gave him to analyse himself aloud.

"What were you thinking of?" Hannibal questioned, and Will sighed wistfully, turning his head away.

He then turned and met his eyes, expression hard but tone gentle, quiet, almost conspiratorial, "Did you kiss me?"

Hannibal's gaze softened, but amusement sparked in his features, "Does your memory fail you?"

Will found a smile of his own: "Couldn't hurt to be reminded."

He was more prepared for it this time. He felt the stubble on his jaw scratch Hannibal's palm as his cheek was caressed, right before he leant in and kissed Will once again. Will closed his eyes to feel it all. The softness of Hannibal's mouth, the heat of his hand on his face, the proximity of his body. His tongue, briefly, as Will kissed back in a bold move, his thoughts liquified at the sensation. He felt the earth move under him. Hannibal didn't try to deepen the kiss, in fear of overstepping, but felt the blush on Will's cheek under his fingers, pink and blossoming.

Will hadn't realised he'd placed a searching hand on Hannibal's chest until he was using it to push him gently back. When their mouths separated he blinked in quick staccato flutters of his eyelids, wanting to hide from the closeness but bask in it longer. It had been too long since he'd been kissed, longer still since he'd genuinely wanted to be. For all his pining, he hadn't thought it possible. He thought he'd be rejected by Hannibal: only to receive and not to take. Will didn't know what to say to him.

They didn't say much else to each other as they were cleaning up, but offered sneaking smiles when their eyes met. Will's smiles vanished too quickly when they weren't being looked at. Hannibal told him he'd definitely have to get rid of the armchair, thanks to the blood that had pooled onto and around Mason's lap, miring the fabric entirely. Will put a plastic bag over Mason's bleeding, eyeless head, tightening it around his neck with tape, and watched it stick to the shocking red of his mutilated face. Hannibal slung his body over his shoulder, like it wasn't heavy at all, and Will opened the door for him, impressed. He saw his car off, awkwardly lingering when he wasn't sure if Hannibal would kiss him again. He refrained, and left Will with his mind alone.

Inexplicably, Will quietly cried that night more than he had in years, the dogs fussing at his duvet and feet when he turned onto his front and felt the cold dampness of the pillow. He hadn't recognised the lump in his throat and cloudiness to his eyes as upset initially, but did when his breathing ruptured in his chest.

Part of it was unshed anger, part relief, part not; the sensitive surface the night had revealed- of touch starvation, and murder, and *love*- had all become so stifling the crying overcame him before he knew what he was doing with himself. He laid there silently racked with sobs, and couldn't fathom what would fill the void sadness and regret had now left in him. If Hannibal's shape would fit the mould, and if that was really what he wanted, or he was simply grappling for stability. Wanting Hannibal, and all he'd done to him, to *stay*.

Just to stay. For *once* in his *life*.

The more he thought about it, the harder it became to put a word to his emotions. As if words didn't match their meanings anymore, as if he suddenly didn't know anything at all. It was

like he'd been asked what year it was, and found himself unable to give any answer. Really, he'd been upended by it- the kiss being the last straw- and it had finally come to fruition in his mind, and in reality. And he couldn't manage what to meet it with. Distrust? Excitement? Pretending it hadn't happened? Nothing made sense to him anymore, even when it came to his own self.

He was in love. And it had undone him. *Changed* him.

But how terrifying that clarity was, when it finally came to him. How peaceful, too.

He was redefining himself, as well as his words, whilst crying like an infant after birth. Like he did in the presence of those shadowed jackals beseeching a meal. And change is always painful.

In a haze, pushing aside his confusion, he thought of Hannibal's comforting hand on his jaw, wiping the tears away with his thumb. Of that tongue he'd had a glimpse of tasting, kissing his eyelids, kissing his face. Down his neck. On his back. He put a finger to his lips, and remembered the contact he'd had with Hannibal's, wishing it to be returned. He wanted Hannibal to press a finger to his lips and push into his mouth. He imagined surgical hands on his bared skin, how dangerous it would be.

He wanted the weight of him pushing down on him, as he'd imagined in dreams he prayed were real, of Hannibal breaking into his house, whilst he was asleep. He'd feel him approach, some dark and feline presence, and feel a shift on the bed. Hannibal would cage him in, and press down against his back, back to chest, heel to toe. Pushing him into the mattress.

He didn't even need to do anything, didn't need to move. The compression offered friction, and warmth, and he panted as it felt hard to breathe. Instead of feeling claustrophobia, or understandably violated, he had been the most turned on he'd been in his entire life.

A thrill ran through him then, colder than his tears that had dried on his face.

Before he could properly talk himself out of it, he gave into his urges, and the bed frame and the meat of his thighs rippled as he bucked against the mattress. He reached a hand between himself to squeeze, a groan catching in his throat. He wondered what Hannibal would say to him if he could see him. If he could, in fantasy. He imagined hot breath on the back of his neck, speaking dark words in unknown tongues, teeth punctuating the sounds, and his breath was ragged.

He came hotly, with a strained whimper, sweat pooled on his back, stickiness shooting up to his chest between the sheets and his thrumming skin. Carefully, he rolled over, cold air tickling him and cooling the mess he'd made, and he stared at the bloodied armchair in the ebbing lightness of early morning sun. Absently, he wished Hannibal was sitting in it, and swallowed thickly, calming his breathing.

Reluctantly, he cleaned himself up with a towel he kept in his drawer, and found that it hadn't cheered him up much, but eased the tension roiling in him. He thought of Hannibal some more, until he fell asleep.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The knuckles of his right hand were bloody and raw.

Hannibal gets a peculiar phone call at four in the morning. Will has been A Silly.

Chapter Notes

This is highkey domestic fluff. Big things to come.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal wasn't angry as he got up, dressed, and drove over an hour and a half at four in the morning, beckoned by a phone call. Sirens wailed past him. Bach hummed on the radio, the engine quieter, the vale of midnight peeling slowly away to reveal the blue-purple light of dawn.

When he parked the car up, it seemed as though people were changing shifts- a couple of people getting in their cars, a group talking out the front of the entrance. Of course, when he got out he felt eyes on him, but had no trouble in going in to the front desk. The lobby was dim, and painted a pale teal colour, with the floor white speckled with black, like a dog blanket, or an eggshell. It smelt dusty. Drunk or high arrestees were shouting from their confines, and the receptionist ticked away at her computer as he told her why he was there.

He was quickly guided through a key-coded door, then down a blue hallway until they opened one of the holding cells. Will was sat on the bunk with his eyes closed, but looked up upon Hannibal's appearance: "Welcome to my home." He greeted, gesturing.

Hannibal sighed, a fondness about it, and sat down next to him. He reeked of scotch, but seemed lucid enough- enough to crack jokes, "I don't want to make a habit of meeting you here, Will."

"Spoil sport." He slurred lowly, leaning heavily into his side. Fortunately, the assault charge had been dropped before they'd booked him, but after they'd dragged him all the way to the precinct. With everyone being overtired and at the tail end of their shifts, it was either he'd have to spend the best part of an hour in a police car to be taken home, or someone would have to come and collect him. Will had them call Hannibal. He didn't know how he'd even remembered his number in the state he was in. The knuckles of his right hand were bloody and raw.

"Am I to take you home? Or would you prefer to stay at mine?"

"Hmmm. I should get back to my dogs." His voice was rough, "I don't want to throw up on your nice floor."

"Are you planning to throw up?"

"Not now."

Hannibal had to sling an arm around him and help him to walk outside. He grabbed onto doorways and the reception desk as he went in a drunken attempt to talk to the staff. It turned out Will was far more sociable the less sober he was.

He immediately fell asleep as they drove, his head against the buzzing car window. Considering he was right next to a doctor, there wasn't much harm in letting him sleep it off for a while; the only real danger was the threat to the leather interior of the Bentley if nausea set in. Hannibal turned the radio down, and opened his window to get air flow, ventilating out the bitter wood stain smell of the cheap, peaty Scottish whiskey Will had got so wrecked on.

As they pulled up to the house, he woke him up with a gentle nudge to his shoulder, and watched him scowl like an upset child. He helped get Will out of the car, holding him up before he fell over himself. The porch steps were a struggle, but Hannibal easily found Will's keys on him, and unlocked the door. The dogs knowingly kept out from under their feet: "I think it'd be best for you to clean yourself up, Will."

"No, no, I don't want a shower." He grumbled, knocking things off his desk with a clumsy hand, making the dogs stir. Hannibal readjusted his grip and hauled him upright when he tried to get away, "Leave me alone, you *fuck--*"

"I'm trying to do what's best for you, Will." He only groaned defeat in response, and waved to the pack on his way past.

"Winston! *Attack!*" The dog woofed softly, "Good boy!"

The bathroom was cramped, but he sat Will down on the toilet seat, watched him sway, and turned on the tap. He crouched down in front of him, and handed him a warm washcloth, which he brought to his face. Hannibal met his eyes, and he gave a crooked smile.

Without being asked, Hannibal moved off, and cleaned up the sink area, cleaning dried toothpaste off his toothbrush, wiping down the shelf, and organising various bottles into the correct colour order. Will admired him as he did it, seeing two of him, squinting at the light. Would've been good if there were two of him. He snorted a laugh at himself.

Despite how good it was that the relief of water on his face woke him up, it also woke his stomach up. He begrudgingly and unsteadily moved to kneel in front of the toilet, opening the lid and mumbling. And started vomiting when Hannibal placed a soothing hand on his back.

Hannibal took his temperature when he'd finished puking his guts out, and gave him a glass of water to drink slowly. He'd sobered up dramatically, but Hannibal still walked him to his bed, helping him in his struggle to undo the buttons of his shirt, and taking his clothes from him. He put on his bed shirt for him: "When I thought about you undressing me, I didn't think it would be like this." Will told him, not aware of himself enough to withhold his thoughts. Hannibal held a private smile, and went to move a chair to sit by Will's bed, "C'mere." Will reached out a limp hand, looking at him under heavy lids.

"Will, you're in no fit state to--"

"No, God, just-- *stay* here. Come *here*." He hit the bed behind him, "Make sure I don't... roll onto my back and choke." He chuckled. With a sigh, Hannibal took off his suit jacket and waistcoat, rounding the bed. He laid on his back, inches from Will, and turned out the bedside lamp once his breathing had went slow and laboured. Winston jumped up on the mattress on Will's side, by his feet, and gave Hannibal a look before curling up to sleep.

Will woke up a couple of hours later, and felt Hannibal's warm, solid form pressed up against his back. He could feel the touch of his hands through the layers of fabric. He sighed, closing his eyes again, and didn't move an inch.

When he woke up again in the late morning, Hannibal was gone. He felt the cold sheets and gripped them in his fist. After a moment, he turned over, and breathed in the scent he'd left on the pillow, of his shampoo, and his cologne, and his own skin.

Just as he was about to bury himself back under his duvet, he smelt something on the air. At first he thought it was burning, and jumped up, racing to the kitchen, only to find nothing burning. Hannibal was cooking egg and bacon, and smiled when he turned to see him. Will steadied himself of the counter, and rubbed his eye: "*Jesus Christ*. Hey."

"Hey yourself." The rest of the dogs scurried in after Will, and began begging for scraps.

"I thought you'd gone."

"I thought you'd sleep through this. You weren't supposed to wake up."

"What? Ever again?" He sniffed, grinning, "Do you want me to go back to bed?"

Hannibal considered it, and took out plates without having to ask where they were, "If you don't mind." The shared a smile, and Will tapped on the countertop, before padding back to the front room. Winston followed him.

He noticed his car parked up outside. Hannibal must've gone and collected it as he slept.

Will found that he hardly had any memory of the previous night. He could remember just before going to the bar, the violence, and sitting calmly in the police cell. Then his toothbrush being cleaned, but nothing more. Thankfully, he didn't lack the common sense to know he and Hannibal hadn't slept together- not in the explicit sense, anyway- as he would've remembered a thing like that. Besides, he trusted that Hannibal wouldn't take that kind of advantage. Trusted him completely, really.

They shared a delicious breakfast in bed, that seemed far too natural, and it made Will feel genuine, unchallenged contentment. Happiness had become such a foreign emotion. He was trying to learn bask in it when it came to him, like the charming, molten heat of the sun.

Hannibal filled in the blanks of his memory, and in turn, Will told him about the man he'd punched a couple of times in the face. Explained that the guy, already plastered, had thrown a drink down him when he rejected his repeated offers to buy him one. Things got heated, he instead took up his offer to take it outside, frustration already brewing beforehand, and proceeded to crack the man's nose in two. Hannibal said he probably had what was coming to him, and that he acted with more restraint than he would've done.

"Why? If you were in my place? Or if you were there to see it happen to me?"

He thought about it around a bite of scrambled egg, "The latter would've drawn me to a more extreme reaction. I can't pretend I don't care about you, Will." A blush burned the tips of Will's ears, hidden by his hair.

Hannibal didn't ask why he'd chosen to go to the bar in the first place. Will probably couldn't have stopped himself from telling the truth if he had; wanting to find the courage in himself to go to Hannibal and thank him for everything, or confess, or-- *something*, and ended up trying to find it at the bottom of a glass. Safe to say it didn't work.

Taking the pain medication he was given, Will looked at the clock. It was two in the afternoon. He almost choked on his drink: "Shouldn't you be at work?"

"I rescheduled my appointments as soon as I awoke."

Will's heart palpitated. He huffed a sigh, "I'm not one of your patients, Doctor. You shouldn't prioritise me."

"That's not for you to worry about." Hannibal remedied, stroking Harley when he came trotting up to him. He held his gaze, "I'm all yours, Will."

Thinking about it, Will couldn't tell if Hannibal was solely being a good person and acting out of the kindness of his heart, or whether he was offering himself for something. He was giving him a prime opportunity to make a move, just as he was to enjoy their time together. He couldn't tell what he wanted to do more. He couldn't tell what *Hannibal* wanted him to do more. If anything. Maybe he was just projecting. His stomach tied itself in knots.

As Will nursed his pounding hangover-induced headache, Hannibal took to doing chores to clean Will's house, making it more presentable. Arranging his fishing lures, putting books back on the shelves, dusting. Will told him multiple versions of *you don't have to do that*, until he relented and said that he wanted to. He genuinely seemed to be enjoying it. There was no use in trying to stop him.

Without offering first, and to cool down his anxiety, Will cleaned Hannibal's car to say thank you. A little exercise wouldn't do his hangover much harm. He'd always been better with actions than words.

Even then, it sometimes took a lot to get him to move to action, leaving little to be desired. And he wanted to be desired.

For a while, Hannibal played Will's neglected piano, and he hadn't realised it was him playing until he came back in the house for some more water. He stood by the door and watched him, wondering why he even kept the instrument in the first place. It was rare he had the want to play it, and he didn't have much of an ambition to learn to begin with. Perhaps it had been sat there waiting for this moment, for Hannibal to come along, like he belonged there, somehow, and his place had been vacant for too many years.

Like he was returning after a long, cold winter.

Chapter End Notes

If you noticed the Detroit: Become Human reference, gold star. If you noticed the Breaking Bad reference, extra large gold star with a side of admiration.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

He pushed his face against the side of Hannibal's head, too shy to kiss his temple, but his lips lingered.

Will figures his feelings out (jump Hannibal's bones) and a gesture is made that seems minute, but will be grand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will knew he'd watch Hannibal's car leave, seeing it file into the wood-line as the night wept stars. He knew he'd stand there for a moment later, as if he expected more. Maybe for it to reappear, or it be a false memory, and Hannibal had decided to stay. He'd caught himself doing it before, but marked it down as his loneliness crying out into the darkened wilds, and desperately awaiting some kind of response.

Honestly, he'd shallowly assumed he was just so starved of touch and talk, that he had began pining, part of his pack with their separation anxiety. Pitiful, really. That he would've presumably begged after absolutely anything that moved, probably fucked them too, if they gave him merely the time of day.

Yet, it wasn't even the tip of the iceberg; it was the frozen air around the iceberg which he hadn't dared to touch. If he thought about it for too long, picturing Hannibal, he would be in the depthless sea, drowning. Too sudden. Too soon and too much.

But nothing could happen soon enough.

Blinking, and watching Buster settle at Hannibal's foot as he continued to play, Will went over to him. He didn't exactly know what he'd planned to do until he found himself draping his arms over Hannibal's shoulders. An embrace unexpected by the both of them. He pushed his face against the side of Hannibal's head, too shy to kiss his temple, but his lips lingered. Will smiled when Hannibal missed a note but was otherwise unresponsive. Unconcerned.

Absently, Will wondered if he would be happy to have him strangle him- how the thump of his body would land strikingly on the piano keys, like the end of a song.

Hannibal, as unhurried and graceful as ever, finished the piece, his deft hands letting notes hang in the air. The smugness about him was as subtle as it was catlike as he leant back into Will's chest, "I will cook you dinner."

"No, you won't." Will rumbled, and moved to let him go until Hannibal's hand reached up to hold his forearm, stopping him.

Hannibal tilted his face towards his, knowing not to ask for a kiss, but he could smell Will's blush as they shared the thought: "I will. I want to."

Enjoying the closeness for a moment longer, Will then sighed heavily, and pulled away from him. Their warm hands brushed.

"The first stag taxidermy I did was after I ran one down with my car. The first meal was made at a later date." Hannibal started, once he'd offered a plate of Ossobuco veal at Will's place setting. Will took up his glass- Hannibal had picked up his own, ostentatious version of groceries it seemed- and imagined it's contents to be blood. Thought about Hannibal picking up the hefty weight of a rutting stag, placing it easily down on a slab, and stripping it of it's skin. Flayed. Opened up to be incised.

He swapped out the weight with that of Mason's body, and swallowed his wine.

"Is that how you find the animals? Roadkill?"

"Not always. So rare that I come across those which aren't flattened, or ones I've hit myself, that it would make my hobby impossible without relying on other, ethical, sources." Will watched him eat the meat before he took his own bite. Saw the red of his tongue when it darted out to wet his lips: "It was hard to recreate something of the creature's stature and pride. It took weeks to mould until it was... perfect."

"I guess you *can* teach an old dog new tricks." Will smiled, not entirely inviting to the parallels drawn to him. His face didn't hold the grimace that it should've done.

Hannibal pretended not to notice, "Fortunately, I haven't harmed another deer since."

He seemed enthused. Chipper, even. Like he tremendously enjoyed caring for him like a child, along with making Will uncomfortable, in the most extreme, and the most menial instances. In fairness, challenging him pushed him away from the bounds of his comfort zone, instigated the change they both sought after- but it also threatened to poke the wrong nerve, and for instinct to come back into play, forcing Will to snatch down the shades.

"But your car says otherwise. I found blood on the grill." Will told him, abruptly, forking another piece, "And on the windshield."

Hannibal inclined his head, taking up his wine, and, before sipping, offered an amused tone, "That wasn't deer blood on the windshield, Will."

Will drew the line at dessert, especially after how filling of a meal it had been and the ardour it took to prepare. He still felt a pang of guilt for how Hannibal had swooped in to retrieve and revive him, spare any form of complaint. Not even a difficult question. Maybe his readiness to be rid of his company was a result of that. Or old, introverted habits.

Or, he no longer trusted his mouth after a little too much thinking, and not enough wine.

He had apologised already, but apologised again to him, when Hannibal collected his things and they dithered by the open door. The dogs made the decision in spite Will, and fled from the tension in the room and out into the open air.

If only it were that simple.

"I would thank you again but you might start getting offended." He scratched the back of his head and looked out to the dogs.

"I would, in turn, tell you you needn't do so, Will." He said his name like it was his own: "And, as much as I enjoyed today for other reasons, I can only ask you don't insist on assaulting anymore people. Least of all those who deserve it." The look in his eyes said something of waste of potential. *Not to waste good meat*, popped into Will's head, like he'd practiced telepathy.

"No promises." He chuckled, fiddling with his hands.

Hannibal was passive in front of him. He could've kissed him, or stabbed him, and they'd be one in the same. Will mused that he probably would've taken both with unfounded warmth and consideration. He couldn't place how that made him feel.

Instead, he chose to hug him. He was held tightly, both equally not wanting to let go. One of Hannibal's firm hands came up to cradle the back of his head, holding it to the join of his shoulder and throat. Will pressed his nose to the skin of Hannibal's neck, smelling of his cologne intermingled with his own smell from the closeness to his things, and yearned to kiss it. But he stopped himself. He remained chaste, and sunk into the comfort of the touch- he'd forgotten how good it felt to be held. How safe.

The sky didn't weep stars as Will had predicted when Hannibal drove away. The moon wasn't visible from it's place in the sky either, but remained as an eerie glow that seeped through the dark clouds. Like blood bleeding through cotton. Winston sniffed the air and tracked Hannibal's footsteps away from Will, rearing his head to see the car off, then looking back up to Will with a question. Will smiled down at him, and led them all inside for dinner.

A few days later, on the back end of a day or two of doing the same observation of Hannibal travelling from his home to his office, Will knew when he wasn't at home. Once the house was abandoned at midday, Will let himself in. Meaning, he *broke* in, and wandered about the place.

He kept backtracking to the basements trapdoor, but didn't go down.

The night of the break-in, Hannibal came home to an unlocked house and Will's trail sticky in the air. But he wasn't there to greet him when he came inside, disappointingly. He and his car were long gone. His scent remained. He'd half-expected to walk in the dining room and find a body splayed out on the mahogany. Possibly an entire severed arm left for him on the kitchen counter, to make a point. To his surprise, and confusion, there was nothing of the sort.

There was however, after a while of eyeing every surface, something attached to one of the stag heads that lined the staircase. A note. Reaching up, Hannibal peeled it off, and it simply

read:

Change your locks.

W.

When the sun rose the next day, and Will let the dogs out, a key was left on his doorstep instead.

Chapter End Notes

sex in the next one, proolly

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

He slipped inside, and didn't seem surprised to sense Will there. He'd waited in the dark, limned only by the moonlight.

Turns out the only help Will needs to be brave enough to make choices, is all the lights being out.

Chapter Notes

A housebreak, followed by what we all expected to happen at some point or another.

(By that, I mean sex, so if that's not for you just skip this chapter! But if it is, I hope you enjoy! They sure did!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will took up the spare key and turned it to lay flat on his palm. He twiddled it around his finger as he drove, thinking of the possibilities of throwing it from the car, or handing it to a stranger, or never using it and keeping it locked away forever. He could make the excuse that one of the dogs took it. Or use it to break in and rearrange the furniture. Leave notes, and shirts, and body parts. Add a corpse to the charming decor.

Hannibal was working late at his office when Will snuck the key into the lock. It was later still, when Hannibal returned home, finding a familiar car parked up out front, and unlocked the door himself. He slipped inside, and didn't seem surprised to sense Will there. He'd waited in the dark, limned only by the moonlight. Lurking in the shadows. He moved through them, towards him.

Their lips crashed together like a punch in the mouth, before either of them could utter a word. Hannibal didn't know what to do with his hands until Will pulled them towards him to give permission. He was bumped up against the wall as he nudged Will's coat off his shoulders, and considered hoisting Will up by the backs of his thighs and turning to shove him into it. Instead, he decided to hook his leg around Will's and knock him. He fell backwards.

Will swore only once when his fall was hardly cushioned by the rug against his back. For a flash, he feared he'd hear footsteps leave him, and feel nothing but the bitter taste of rejection in his mouth.

He chose not to ask, because Hannibal dropped to his knees between his legs, and pressed down to him to push a biting kiss just under his chin. Firm, warm hands found the curves of his thighs, reaching between them. Will sighed shakily, his heart frantic in his ears, his arousal overwhelming like waves steaming hot. He stared up at the depthless black of the ceiling, imagined it to be the sky, and felt untethered when he moaned at Hannibal's teeth grazing his throat.

It's an awkward position. A lot less than it would've been against the wall, but as Hannibal made about shedding him of his clothes, wood of the floor bumping the ridges of his spine, Will thought it to be strange. Everything looked so much taller from this upward angle, Hannibal's body curling over him like a predator with it's mate. His concentration swam a little, thinking that he probably hadn't actively chosen to lay on the floor since he was a child, and how spontaneous this all really was, but his musings were quickly scattered when Hannibal's warm hand slid itself between his legs, cupping and feeling him through the fabric of his boxers. He could feel himself sweating, his blood rushing.

Tightness converged in his groin, twisting him up like a spring, and Hannibal yanked his khakis down in the same movement as he pushed his shirt up to his chest. Will tried to keep his breathing even and drawn, trying to sate his arousal enough so he wouldn't be coming within merely a few minutes.

He squeezed his eyes shut. Hannibal kissed down from his sternum to his stomach, and Will filed a hand into his hair when he dipped his head lower. The wetness of his mouth was like the heat of red sunset, livid and all-encompassing. A whine got stuck in his throat.

It was only when he had two fingers inside him, knuckle-deep with lube and sweat sticky on his already aching thighs, did he start to make noise. But his eloquence had already abandoned him, "Oh, *fuck*. Hannibal- I-- *God*," He buried his face under the crook of his arm, squirming and carefully rocking his hips. Now naked, he'd bunched his shirt under his head, and burned bright where he was touched. He bit at the skin of his bicep when Hannibal's fingers pushed deep, pressing up, "*Ah!*-- Hannibal, please-

"Yes, Will?" His voice sounded far off, like he was in a dream. Christ, it wouldn't come as a surprise if he was. Breath hot on the inseam of his thigh. He was leaking, and his brain felt fluid: "What do you want?"

"I want to feel you. All of you."

"Would you let me do anything to you?" Hannibal asked, a threat and a promise.

"Yes." He bit out, not thinking.

"Greed is very becoming on you, Will."

"I'll *become* impatient if you don't hurry the fuck up." He breathed, knowing to brace himself but failing entirely.

"Crass." Hannibal scolded, removing his fingers as if he'd thought better of it. Will's only protest was a harsh, shaky breath. The anticipation tightened his chest.

Will could only hear what was happening, the shushing of clothes, and he didn't give himself much time to prepare until he was being pushed into. He grabbed the hand Hannibal had put on the join of his shoulder, brought it to his mouth. He let him feel the caress of his teeth, the eagerness of his tongue, the vibrations of his desperate voice. He bit at his fingertips. Sucked.

The darkness made him brave.

It was messy and loud, and if Will could see and hear himself in the state he was in he would've been embarrassed. But he wasn't; far from it.

He pushed the heel of his hand to Hannibal's chest, as if he was about to push him away. In turn, he was gentle with him, slow. Will told him not to be. It wasn't enough.

Taking in a breath, he arched his back to make the sensations strike marrow-deep. Their shared sounds permeated the walls.

Pace evolving in speed and boldness, Will could feel himself drifting in a space beyond the floorboards and glassy eyes of beasts, overcome with his own pleasure, and how it washed his mind clean of anything but *Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal*. What was life without this? Without *him*? And could he go back to living without it after they'd gone this far- rutting in the dark like nocturnal, feral creatures do, untamed, relenting themselves to the whims of each other and their desires?

He couldn't imagine doing this to anyone else. *With* anyone else.

When he began to roll his hips experimentally, it released a rough moan, and his head fell back as he arched his spine; the broad expanse of his neck and chest was offered up, like an animal in submission. Hannibal lurched over him, chest-to-chest, his pelvis rocking back and forth, back and forth, hardly bringing himself out before pushing in. So full, so possessed, Will reckoned he'd only last minutes. They kissed like it was the only thing that mattered.

"I've provoked you before. I've offended you before," He panted, mouth open against Hannibal's cheekbone, "How far could I go-- push you, before you- turned on me?"

A grumble resonated between their bodies, Hannibal's speech mired with exertion, low and throaty, "To the ends of the earth, my Will."

In that moment, he regretted not being able to see him. To notice how dark and primal the mirth in his eyes looked, just as intense as it felt. Something obscene enough to make thrills dance across his skin. He wanted to watch him unraveling. Another time, maybe.

To do this another time would surely kill him.

He kissed him sloppily and hastily, circling his legs over his waist, lifting his hips. Yielding everything he had to give, at his weakest and most vulnerable, and thoroughly enjoying every second. One hand on Will's leg, one of his jaw, Hannibal sunk lower, almost all of his weight bearing down to him, closing in on all sides. Will moaned into his mouth, and wrapped his arms around his neck, pulling him ever closer so his hands, then forearms, came down to the

floor either side of him, breath knocked from him in a brief noise. His knees were lifted off the floor so he was entirely seated inside him, thrusts moving in circular motions.

Will was right there now, caged in and pressed down on, and he gripped to him tightly, holding on for his life as you would an untamed stallion, or a cliff's edge, and if he were to let go he'd fall so far he wouldn't know where it would end, and he came, hard and all at once, clawed hands and curled toes. Crying out Hannibal's name like blasphemy. In seconds, Hannibal was coming too, snarling then biting at his neck as he planted himself, once, twice, spilling liquid heat inside him. Devastated.

He was still sprawled over him possessively for the minutes following, both trying to catch their breaths. Will didn't want to open his eyes, everything drained entirely out of him, and content with staying exactly like it forever. Slowly, things began to hurt, and sweat began to cool, until the blinding haze of sex relinquished to exhaustion, and a pungent afterglow.

They somehow made it upstairs, and could finally see each other in the dim light of the bedside lamp. An ebb of arousal piqued in Will, refuelling him only a tad. Feeling him was one thing, but seeing him was an entirely different beast.

He wouldn't forget any of this. Neither of them would.

Deftly, Hannibal pushed Will down onto the mattress, settled between his legs, pushed up his thighs, and began lapping up the mess he'd made that had started to trickle out of him: "You make me sick." Was the only comment Will made, smiling tiredly despite his scowl, and sighing at the last tendril of pleasure tingled in him like a dying fire. The feel of it made him twitch.

He almost arched away from him, sensitive and too worn to think let alone gather the energy for a round two, but indulged him all the same. He marvelled at Hannibal's stamina, even if it was waning slightly.

Once satisfied, finally, and obviously very pleased with himself, Hannibal dropped down next to him. Will curled into his arm, pressing a kiss to his shoulder, "You planned this."

"I only gave you what you needed." He said, and God, the effect fatigue had on him was gorgeous, "You made the decision all on your own."

He closed his eyes, "You knew I'd make this one."

"I only hoped." He could hear the smile in his voice. Will smiled back, and knocked a leg between his as he rolled onto him, holding his face.

"I can't complain." He said, kissing him easily, until sleep settled over him, and let them both rest.

Sorry this took so long to update, it's hard to write this stuff so it doesn't just sound like lewd, robotic porn. We should be back to regular scheduled programming soon enough.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

"You stalk me to my office."

Ummmmmm no he doesn't? Cue Will Scared-Of-Intimacy (and stabbing) Graham.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

During the night, Will awoke, and was halfway to falling out of the bed, having rolled over in an unconscious bid to hide. It took a moment to regain orientation, and Hannibal's arm was still trapped underneath him. He didn't understand it. Will had to admit that he'd never been so dedicated to cuddle or sleep with someone to sacrifice the use of his arm. Blood circulation, and all that. It wasn't exactly comfortable to lay on.

Instead of getting up, he rolled over to his front, onto Hannibal, fitting himself into his side. He pushed a hand to lie across the expose of his chest, as if moving to strangle him. Hannibal, who was lying on his back, sighed a breath and trailed his hand up the line of Will's hip to settle on his ribcage and hold him close: "You stalk me to my office." He said, then opened one eye narrowly, just enough for Will to notice.

"You thought now would be a good time to bring that up?" Will said, pushing his nose against the side of his head.

Hannibal sighed again, his thumb moving back and forth over one of Will's ribs, "Broaching such a subject is difficult."

"Unless we've just fucked?"

"Unless we're both in no position to threaten one another with violence." Hannibal amended, voice low, eyes closed. Will moved his leg to rest over the join of Hannibal's hip, foot between his. He was distracted by the thought of smothering him with a pillow if he tried anything.

"I suppose it's unlikely you'll be quick to anger in bed," After a second, "Shame."

"The matter at hand, Will?"

"Okay, I don't *stalk*. I lurk." Will sighed, still able to see Hannibal's inscrutable profile in the dark. He liked being this close to him, almost fusing together. He could smell his hair, and his scent, and enjoyed the salt of his skin when he kissed his cheekbone, mumbling, "And when I'm not there you look for me."

Hannibal turned his head to him, "How would you know I look for you if you're not there?"

Will sullied his grin, and simply moved a hand to trace over Hannibal's neck, touching over his pulse, his jaw, "You're not painting me in a good light when you put it like that."

"How am I meant to put it?" He could sense he was humoured by all this: "Tailing? Spying?"

"Lovingly observing?"

"And, considering our shared interests, how was I to know that what you took to doing was loving?"

Will hummed, reading his face by stroking a finger across his brow, down his nose, settling on his Cupid's bow, like he was sculpting him. Hannibal's lips parted a little at the touch. Will sighed, "You've taught me about instincts. I thought you'd trust your own." His body was radiating heat, he could feel his breath, "What did they tell you?"

Hannibal's arm around him got heavier, to keep him closer, safer. They met each other's eyes in a way that was more of a feeling than a visible indication. The shy light of the street was the only thing that carved out the man's eyes from the rest of his shadowy face. He felt his breath on his cheek as he spoke, punctuated by a kiss: "What should they have done?"

He wanted to glean it from him, easily and pliant, as you would foam from a lake. There was something intrinsic in Will that resisted admitting his feelings; a by-product of the exact same empathy that afflicted him, ever since childhood, with a perchance towards murdering immoral people, and taking in stray dogs.

His vulnerability gave other people an edge. Easy to cut him with.

He didn't worry about being judged- especially not nestled in bed with Hannibal, of all people- he feared the consequences. Exclusion, abuse, rejection. *Loneliness*. All bred from someone else's perception of him. He could see it when it formed, and could make out it's fractured, marred silhouette, watching vitriol get seamed into the fabric of who he was when held in their gaze. It wasn't hard to see what reaction he'd get. He knew how people moved.

Will wanted to tell him. To say he wanted him to warp and bend around him, like the thrill of a tide does in honour of the moon.

His heart did pirouettes along his ribcage. Instead, he thought about how warm he was, and the smell of the room. *Was it their room now?* It could be.

He kissed him in reply, just because he could.

Hannibal wasn't a *fix-it*. Will needed to remind himself. Despite the fact that he had, both physically and somewhat emotionally, given him a kind of purpose back, a zeal, he was by no means cured. Focusing most of his energy and thought onto the man was probably just as bad as when he retained the head spaces of killers. It wasn't coping, it was escaping.

His affections didn't give him the excuse to sink in to the poor habits he'd retained, yet he found himself thinking as much. Hannibal was important to him, but what about his *own self*? What about his *health*? He had to put himself before his feelings, before Hannibal. *Before* his impulses. It was like gutting out the interior of his subconscious mind, and remodelling. After the night they'd spent together, he stayed at home for a couple days, mainly to remember who he was when he was alone. He didn't mind that person now, but it didn't feel right to be by himself. It was strange to not want to be lonely- true, his isolation was a curse, but it was manageable. His own company wasn't very difficult to keep.

Hannibal had called him twice, but he didn't pick up. A voicemail was left, but he didn't listen to it.

Will worried that he'd start to blur the boundaries of what made them separate. That he'd crawled inside his head, just to get out of his own. Had he? *Already*?

He had before.

Feeding the dogs and watching them scabble to their meals, he wondered if he'd ever looked that fierce. That depraved. Like a *predator*. That didn't sit with him well. It has the habit of making him feel powerful, but it could also make him feel sick. He poured himself a finger of whiskey, and sat out on the porch; the breeze meant he should've put long sleeves on, but he let himself shiver. The whiskey warmed him.

He didn't need to justify the reasons why he killed when he knew it felt good doing it.

Some people deserve to die.

He deserved to kill them.

It didn't leave much. A legacy, sure, but who for? Some twisted heritage to give someone- he knew better than to let those genes sully the waters. The sense of fulfilment waned when he found himself feeling nothing at all. It was a strange existence.

Sometimes it felt like he thought it was worth cracking a few eggs to make an omelette. But when he pushed his way through heaps of broken eggshells and broken bodies, he never even found the omelette.

Buster hopped up onto his lap and almost knocked the glass from his hand. He smiled as he drank, fiddling with the velvet soft fur of his ears when he curled up.

Once the yellow light of his house spilled out into the blackened field and the night beyond, Will settled the dogs, locked the doors, and drew the curtains. He to imagine his little farmhouse as an bright boat in the sea, attracting insects with its light. Safe and warm inside. Him and his pack against the world.

Only when the alcohol hummed nicely under his skin, making his head swim with drugged fatigue, did he wrap himself up in bed and pull out his phone. The one Hannibal bought him. He hadn't changed the sheets since he stayed, and could smell him on the pillows.

He listened to the voicemail in the dark. Once, then twice more. He closed his tired eyes and imagined Hannibal was in the room with him, asking him how he was, telling him he'd be over tomorrow. The low timbre of his voice made his insides tighten up, bracing himself for something that never came. He actually missed him, and let himself feel it, finally.

He stared at the message- *at the call button*- until the glow of the screen burned his retinas, feeling the bloodshot seep into the whites of his eyes.

Then he deleted the evidence, and turned over to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

"Has he? Already? He has before." Remember that, kids.

End Notes

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